

Know It All

Job 42:1-6

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I. I Know You vs. 1-2

- a. Do all Things
 - i. His created order is not a rule-bound mechanism, sustained by principles of balance and equity and retribution and equivalence. Yahweh's universe is a vast array of differences held together by the divine intimacy with its manifoldness and the divine delight
 - ii. Job's words **I know that You can do all things** point up the folly of his questioning God's ability to govern the universe. Job's efforts to thwart (lit., "cut off") God's **plan** were now seen as futile.
 - iii. This "I know" was Job's first response to the amazing revelation of God out of the storm, his confession that God "can do all things" (Matt 19:26).
- b. Purpose - **project, plan**
 - i. Purpose- project plan but is adequately attested in the morally neutral sense "purpose, intention, thinking"
 - ii. Thwarted - to be inaccessible, to **be impossible**- Gn 11:6 Jb 42:2; to be excluded from

II. I Know You Know vs. 3-4

- a. Questions-
 - i. Again Job quoted the Lord, this time citing God's challenge at the beginning of each of His two speeches (38:3; 40:7): **I will question you, and you shall answer Me**. This quotation implied an admission that Job was unable to answer any of the Sovereign's barrage of rhetorical questions. Job admitted to flunking God's biology examinations.
- b. Hides Counsel
 - i. Hides - to **be (become) darkened, black**
 - ii. **Counsel**- who will carry out his plan Is 46:11; b) absolute: i) עֵצָה the plan of Yahweh, his planning Is 28:29; ii) Jb 38:2 42:3 the "decision" of Yahweh, i.e. "his planning concerning his work of creation", almost his providence
 - iii. **Without Knowledge**- Knowledge without, discernment **knowledge** about a subject' unintentionally, inadvertently
 - 1. Job quoted God's question **Who is this that obscures My counsel without knowledge?** to infer that God was right. Job had spoken without knowledge (as Elihu had said, 34:35; 35:16); he talked

about things beyond his comprehension, things **too wonderful** (cf. “wonders” in 37:14)

- c. Need Understanding
 - i. Don't Understand- to **understand**, to **see**
 - ii. Too Wonderful for me
 - 1. Wonderful - to be treated as unusual, inappropriate, meaning to **be too difficult**
 - 2. Now this is a capitulation indeed. If cosmic justice is God's business, then it is whatever he decides it is. It is not a principle to which he himself is subject, to which he gives his allegiance. It is not a rule, the knowledge of which is shared by Yahweh and humans
 - 3. In Job's first response (40:3–5) he admitted his finiteness in the face of God's display of numerous wonders of nature above, on, and under the earth.
- d. What I Need
 - i. Speak
 - ii. Ask
 - 1. Instruct - to **let someone know something**

III. Now that I Know vs. 5-6

- a. Now that I See
 - i. Heard
 - 1. Heard - Heard a witness to what he had heard
 - 2. Hearing of ear
 - a. “I knew you only by hearsay,” NEB “I knew of thee then only by report”;
 - ii. Eyes See you
 - 1. But now that Job was addressed directly by God, this experience exceeded his previous knowledge, like seeing (**now my eyes have seen You**) compared with hearing. This thrilling view of God, probably spiritual insight, not physical vision, deepened his perspective and appreciation of God.
 - 2. Job had only **heard of** God's doings. The complainer was not an eyewitness of the act of Creation, a fact God called to his attention near the beginning of His first speech (38:4–11). Nor could Job even view firsthand many aspects of natural Creation (38:16–24; 39:1–4). His perspective of God's total workings was therefore limited and secondhand.
- b. Retract
 - i. Retract- Retract to reject what one has said previously, revoke
 - 1. “reject, despise, repudiate,” and thus “have had enough”; so “I have mourned enough” or “I have had enough of it all

2. What Job now despises, refuses, rejects is his former attitude and utterances
3. Job now discarded his complaints about God's inability to rule the world with justice. The idea that he could boldly refute any of God's trumped-up charges (23:4–7; 31:35–36) was now abandoned.
4. Having gained insight (v. 5) into God's ways and character—His creative power and genius, His sovereign control, and His providential care and love—Job confessed his own unworthiness and repented. **I despise myself** means he rejected his former accusations of God spoken in pride. God had already rebuked Job for indicting, faulting, and discrediting Him (40:2).

ii. Repent

1. Repent- Repent - to **regret**: a) to become remorseful to **console oneself** a) to find consolation
 - a. Nevertheless, his confrontation with the Lord did bring about a change of mind and an expansion and deepening of his knowledge of God.
 - b. Obviously he did not repent of the sins which his three friends had conjured up. He stuck persistently to his position that his suffering was not merited by pre-calamity sins (Job 27:2–6). But, as Elihu had pointed out, bitterness and pride had followed his loss of wealth, family, and health (32:2; 33:17; 35:12–13; 36:9; 37:24). At first, however, Job's response was proper (1:21–22; 2:10). Job now saw, as God had challenged him (40:10), that no one can stand accusingly against Him. Realizing that God is not obligated to man, Job's questions vanished and his resentment left. He was now satisfied, for God had communicated with him about His own person, not about Job's problems. Now Job was willing to trust the Sovereign, whose ways are perfect (Ps. 18:30), even when he could not understand. Undoubtedly God forgave him of his former sin of pride
 - c. It is important to note that Job did not confess any overt sins such as those Eliphaz had accused him of (22:2–11) nor any covert sins as Bildad has implied (8:11–18). The text does not, in fact, specify what Job "repented" of. Most who have come this far in the book say that Job confessed a bad attitude, a touch of arrogance, or mild blasphemy. I prefer to say that he confessed that his God had been too small. He needed the theophany to remind him of the fact that the God of the universe and the Creator of all

creatures is greater, grander, higher, and wiser than a mortal can imagine, much less challenge.

2. In Dust and Ashes

- a. Then he “repented in dust and ashes,” an outward demonstration of his inward contrition and the death of his own opinions. He deeply regretted the presumption of his foolish words
- b. Job then repented **in dust and ashes**, a way of expressing his self-deprecation (cf. Gen. 18:27). Throwing dust in the air so that it came down on one’s head (cf. Job 2:12) and sitting in or near ashes or with ashes on one’s body (cf. 2:8; Isa. 58:5; Dan. 9:3) were signs of a humbled condition. Having grieved over his losses, Job now grieved over his sin.
- c. if *repent* is rightly read, enforces Job’s grief and penitence; cp. Is. 58:5, “Is this the fast that I choose ... that (a man) should spread ashes”: Jon. 3:6, “And the king of Nineveh ... covered himself with sackcloth and sat on ashes

Alternate View

The *genre* of the speech is, unsurprisingly, that of the *legal disputation*

At the end of a lawsuit, the plaintiff would be expected to accept or reject the case offered by the defendant, and the expectation of readers is that such will be the function of this speech. Job's position, however, appears to be ambivalent. On the one hand, he concludes with a statement that he is "submitting," or withdrawing from the case (if the interpretation of the term סָמַח in v 6 set out below is correct). On the other hand, he does not concede that his opponent is in the right or that he is in the wrong. He does concede that he made his depositions "without understanding" and regarding matters "too wonderful" for him (v 3), and yet he says no more of the divine speeches than that he has "heard" them. This sounds rather like a non-acceptance of their argument.

there are the common terms "listen," "speak," "question," and "answer," which all belong in that setting. One important legal term occurs in v 3, where I have translated הִגַּדְתִּי "I made my depositions" (הִגַּד hiph) The term has been used by Job in 31:37, where he said that if only he could encounter God face to face in a legal setting he would "give him an account (הִגַּד hiph) of [his] steps," i.e., he would set out in detail the evidence of his life that would prove him an innocent man.

Word Studies

Job Answered –

Purpose - **project, plan**: a) of people¹

Thwarted - to be inaccessible, to **be impossible** (יָנָה for) Gn 11:6 Jb 42:2; to be excluded from²

¹ Ludwig Koehler et al., [*The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*](#) (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994–2000), 566.

² Ludwig Koehler et al., [*The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*](#) (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994–2000), 148.

Hides - to **be (become) darkened, black**³

Counsel - who will carry out his plan Is 46:11; b) absolute: i) עֲצָה the plan of Yahweh, his planning Is 28:29; ii) Jb 38:2 42:3 the “decision” of Yahweh, i.e. “his planning concerning his work of creation”, almost his providence⁴

Knowledge without, discernment **knowledge** about a subject: יָדַּבְּרָהּ unintentionally, inadvertently⁵

Understand - to **understand, to see**

Wonderful - to be treated as unusual, inappropriate, meaning to **be too difficult**⁶

Instruct - to **let someone know something**⁷

Heard a witness to what he had heard⁸

Retract to reject what one has said previously, revoke⁹

Repent - to **regret**: a) to become remorseful ¹⁰ to **console oneself** a) to find consolation¹¹

³ Ludwig Koehler et al., [*The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*](#) (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994–2000), 835.

⁴ Ludwig Koehler et al., [*The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*](#) (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994–2000), 867.

⁵ Ludwig Koehler et al., [*The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*](#) (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994–2000), 229.

⁶ Ludwig Koehler et al., [*The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*](#) (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994–2000), 927.

⁷ Ludwig Koehler et al., [*The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*](#) (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994–2000), 392.

⁸ Ludwig Koehler et al., [*The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*](#) (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994–2000), 1571.

⁹ Ludwig Koehler et al., [*The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*](#) (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994–2000), 540.

¹⁰ Ludwig Koehler et al., [*The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*](#) (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994–2000), 688.

¹¹ Ludwig Koehler et al., [*The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*](#) (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994–2000), 688.

Commentary Studies

42:1–6. In the present state of the text, 2–6 contain Job’s reply to Yahweh’s *second* speech (40:7–41:26), 1 being the ordinary introductory formula; but originally, as it would seem, 2–6 formed the conclusion (immediately following 40:4, 5) of Job’s reply to Yahweh’s *only* speech. See on 40:4f. and 6 (p. 348 f.).

2. Job acknowledges that God can achieve all that He plans, and that He plans knowing that He can do all things.—*Is impossible for*] lit. *is cut off from*: see phil. n.

3a, b. = 38:2, a marginal note. Dr¹². (*Book of Job*), treating it as an integral part of the text, remarks: “understand here, *Thou didst say truly*. Job repeats the question addressed to him in 38:2, for the purpose of admitting (lines 2 and 3 [= c, d above]) the justice of the rebuke implied in it.”—**c.** Cp¹³. 38:4b, 18. **d.** Cp¹⁴. Ps. 139:6.

4. Cp¹⁵. 21:2f., 33:31; b = 38:3b. Like 3a, b the v. is probably a marginal note; otherwise Dr.: “Job repeats, in line 1, the substance [merely abandoning the figure of battle, Di.], and in line 2 the actual words of God’s challenge to him in 38:3 (= 40:7), prior to confessing (v. 5) his inability to meet it, and retracting (v. 6) his former presumptuous utterances.”

5. In speaking of the wonderful ways of God (3) on the ground of what he had heard about God, Job now realizes that he had spoken unwisely and ignorantly; for there has now come to him through vision intimate first-hand personal knowledge of God, which does not indeed clear up for him all mysteries, but does show him that, if they are mysteries, they are the mysteries of one in the vision of whom there is peace and blessedness. Vision is here contrasted as direct personal experience of what a person is and does with hearing as knowledge at second-hand, knowledge of some other’s experience or report of that person, knowledge which, even if not mingled with error, as was the traditional doctrine of God, which had been passed on to Job, must at best be blurred and indistinct; for the contrast, cp¹⁶. 28:21f., Ps. 48:9 (the stories of the fathers about God (cp¹⁷. Ps. 44:2) verified by the direct sight, *i.e.* experience, of the present generation). The vision spoken of is not the sight of any form or appearance of God; for there is no indication that Job is conceived as having seen such, and, moreover, the sight of an appearance or outward form is just as far as hearing from giving direct, intimate, true knowledge (cp¹⁸. Is. 11:3, 1 S. 16:7). What Job has seen, *i.e.* experienced, is just what he had wished to see (19:27), viz. that God is not against him or estranged from him; and his wish has been more than fulfilled, for the vision has come to him before death.

6. The v. is probably corrupt, the words *I repudiate and repent* being uncertain and ambiguous (see phil. n.); and the phrasing of the v. rather tame and unsatisfactory.—*Upon dust*

¹²Dr. *The Book of Job in the Revised Version*, 1906.

¹³Cp. Compare.

¹⁴Cp. Compare.

¹⁵Cp. Compare.

¹⁶cp. Compare.

¹⁷cp. Compare.

¹⁸cp. Compare.

and ashes] 2:8: the clause, if *repent* is rightly read, enforces Job's grief and penitence; cp¹⁹. Is. 58:5, "Is this the fast that I choose ... that (a man) should spread ashes": Jon. 3:6, "And the king of Nineveh ... covered himself with sackcloth and sat on ashes."²⁰

The concluding words of Job are about half quotations of what God had said to him. This famous confession of Job has been the source of countless essays, monographs, sermons, and opinions. It is important to note that Job did not confess any overt sins such as those Eliphaz had accused him of (22:2–11) nor any covert sins as Bildad has implied (8:11–18). The text does not, in fact, specify what Job "repented" of. Most who have come this far in the book say that Job confessed a bad attitude, a touch of arrogance, or mild blasphemy. I prefer to say that he confessed that his God had been too small. He needed the theophany to remind him of the fact that the God of the universe and the Creator of all creatures is greater, grander, higher, and wiser than a mortal can imagine, much less challenge.

42:1 This verse is identical to 40:3.

42:2 Sometimes when Job said "I know" in the past, he was right (9:2; 13:18; 19:25; 21:27), and sometimes he was wrong (9:28; 10:13; 30:23). This "I know" was Job's first response to the amazing revelation of God out of the storm, his confession that God "can do all things" (Matt 19:26). Since God has done such things in the past, Job recognized in the second part of this confession that "no plan" of God in the future "can be thwarted." Job was learning the lesson Nebuchadnezzar learned centuries later (Dan 4:35):

He does as he pleases
with the powers of heaven
and the people of the earth.
No one can hold back his hand
or say to him: "What have you done?"

42:3 As the brackets indicate, the NI²¹V understands the first line of v. 3 as a quotation of God.¹³²²⁶ It is very similar to 38:2, the first words of Yahweh out of the storm. Job agreed with God that he was guilty as charged. He had spoken out of ignorance of things that were beyond his ability to understand (Ps 131:1). It is a charge that would indict us all.

¹⁹cp. Compare.

²⁰ Samuel Rolles Driver and George Buchanan Gray, [*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Job*](#), vol. 1, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1921), 371–373.

²¹NIV *New International Version*

²²¹³⁶ So too GNB. Other English versions e.g., RSV, NASB, put in the quotation marks with no other indication of the speaker. Others eliminate the line as a misplaced duplication of 38:2. So Moffatt, NAB, NEB. The JB has a convenient solution, "I am the man who obscured," reading 'n as a relative pronoun rather than interrogative. Cf. AAT.

42:4 As in v. 3 we have another quotation of God, this time from 38:3 or 40:7.¹³²³⁷

42:5 In 26:14 Job heard a faint whisper of God in the thunderstorm. Now he confessed that in addition to hearing he had also “seen” God. When Isaiah “saw the King, the LORD Almighty,” he cried, “Woe to me!” Job’s response in the next verse is less dramatic but equally sincere and profound.

42:6 This is one of the most important verses in the book, if not the most important. As a result of seeing God, Job “hated/despised” himself, a much stronger reaction than the “unworthy” of 40:4. Then he “repented in dust and ashes,” an outward demonstration of his inward contrition and the death of his own opinions.¹³²⁴⁸ He deeply regretted the presumption of his foolish words. “Repent” and “comfort” are both translations of the same word, but certainly this context expects repentance.¹³²⁵⁹ None of the arguments of his friends could elicit this response, largely because their accusations were off the mark and their logic flawed. It was not his sin that brought about the suffering as they had claimed. Nevertheless, his confrontation with the Lord did bring about a change of mind and an expansion and deepening of his knowledge of God. Most conversions come not by way of apologetics but as people see the Lord and hear him through his Word.²⁶

5b. In what sense has Job “seen” God? Tur-Sinai’s conjecture that an older version of the story related more of God’s appearance seems rather unlikely. We must assume that Job is now convinced of what he had doubted, viz., God’s providential care. He had hoped for the assurance that God was on his side and would vindicate him. This, he had insisted, 19:23–27, must come somehow—if not during his life, then later. Now that God has spoken directly to him, Job’s demands have been met.

6. *recant*. It is usually explained that the object of the verb has been lost from the text. K²⁷J and RS²⁸V follow LX²⁹X (*emauton*) and supply “myself.” LX³⁰X actually gives a double translation of the verb but does

²³¹³⁷ This verse as well is skipped by Moffatt, NAB, and NEB and bracketed by AB and JB. AAT adds a “you said,” but NJPS, like KJV, ASV does not even use quotation marks.

²⁴¹³⁸ A. Wolters would read the preposition עַל as לַע, “child.” “‘A Child of Dust and Ashes’ (Job 42, 6b),” ZAW 102 (1990): 116–19. It is an unconvincing proposal.

²⁵¹³⁹ Usually the *niphal* is “repent,” and the *piel* is “comfort.” Cf. 2:11. D. J. O’Connor, however, argues for “I am consoled” even though he was still “in dust and ashes.” “Job’s Final Word—‘I Am Consoled ...’ (42:6b),” ITQ 50 (1983/84): 181. W. Morrow believes that the word was chosen for its ambiguity (“Consolation, Rejection, and Repentance in Job 42:6,” JBL 105 [1986]: 225).

²⁶ Robert L. Alden, *Job*, vol. 11, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1993), 407–411.

²⁷KJ The King James, or Authorized Version of 1611

²⁸RSV The Revised Standard Version, 1946, 1952

²⁹LXX The Septuagint

³⁰LXX The Septuagint

not necessarily reflect any textual difference. Targ³¹. adds an object, “my wealth.” JP³²S supplies “my words.” The latter is doubtless the correct interpretation. What Job now despises, refuses, rejects is his former attitude and utterances. The verb *m*’s is not used of self-loathing. In 9:21 it is not himself, but his miserable condition that Job finds distasteful. When the object of the verb is clear from the context, it does not need to be expressed; cf. 7:16. There is no reason to take the verb here in the sense of “melt, pine away,” as in 7:5. Cf. L. J. Kuyper, V³³T 9 (1959), 91–94.

6b. Job is already sitting in ashes, 2:8. Cf. Isa 58:5; Jer 6:26; Jon 3:6; Mic 1:10.³⁴

42:1–2. In Job’s first response (40:3–5) he admitted his finiteness in the face of God’s display of numerous wonders of nature above, on, and under the earth. But he did not admit to God’s sovereignty or to his own sin of pride. **Job** now confessed those two things in his second reply. Overwhelmed by the strength and fierceness of the behemoth and the leviathan, Job sensed his own inadequacy to conquer and control evil, which they represented. He therefore saw anew the greatness of God’s power and sovereignty. Job’s words **I know that You can do all things** point up the folly of his questioning God’s ability to govern the universe. Job’s efforts to thwart (lit., “cut off”) God’s **plan** were now seen as futile.

42:3. Job quoted God’s question **Who is this that obscures My counsel without knowledge?** to infer that God was right. Job had spoken without knowledge (as Elihu had said, 34:35; 35:16); he talked about things beyond his comprehension, things **too wonderful** (cf. “wonders” in 37:14) or awesome in creation **for him to know**. Job now discarded his complaints about God’s inability to rule the world with justice. The idea that he could boldly refute any of God’s trumped-up charges (23:4–7; 31:35–36) was now abandoned.

42:4–5. Again Job quoted the Lord, this time citing God’s challenge at the beginning of each of His two speeches (38:3; 40:7): **I will question you, and you shall answer Me**. This quotation implied an admission that Job was unable to answer any of the Sovereign’s barrage of rhetorical questions. Job admitted to flunking God’s biology examinations.

Job had only **heard of** God’s doings. The complainer was not an eyewitness of the act of Creation, a fact God called to his attention near the beginning of His first speech (38:4–11). Nor could Job even view firsthand many aspects of natural Creation (38:16–24; 39:1–4). His perspective of God’s total workings was therefore limited and secondhand.

But now that Job was addressed directly by God, this experience exceeded his previous knowledge, like seeing (**now my eyes have seen You**) compared with hearing. This thrilling view of God, probably spiritual insight, not physical vision, deepened his perspective and appreciation of God. What Job now knew of God was incomparable to his former ideas, which

³¹Targ. Targum, Aramaic translations or paraphrases

³²JPS Jewish Publication Society of America: The Holy Scriptures, 1917

³³VT Vetus Testamentum

³⁴Marvin H. Pope, [*Job: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*](#), vol. 15, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 348–349.

were really ignorant. This personal confrontation with God silenced his arguing and deepened his awe.

42:6. Having gained insight (v. 5) into God's ways and character—His creative power and genius, His sovereign control, and His providential care and love—Job confessed his own unworthiness and repented. **I despise myself** means he rejected his former accusations of God spoken in pride. God had already rebuked Job for indicting, faulting, and discrediting Him (40:2).

Job then repented **in dust and ashes**, a way of expressing his self-deprecation (cf. Gen. 18:27). Throwing dust in the air so that it came down on one's head (cf. Job 2:12) and sitting in or near ashes or with ashes on one's body (cf. 2:8; Isa. 58:5; Dan. 9:3) were signs of a humbled condition. Having grieved over his losses, Job now grieved over his sin.

Obviously he did not repent of the sins which his three friends had conjured up. He stuck persistently to his position that his suffering was not merited by pre-calamity sins (Job 27:2–6). But, as Elihu had pointed out, bitterness and pride had followed his loss of wealth, family, and health (32:2; 33:17; 35:12–13; 36:9; 37:24). At first, however, Job's response was proper (1:21–22; 2:10). Job now saw, as God had challenged him (40:10), that no one can stand accusingly against Him. Realizing that God is not obligated to man, Job's questions vanished and his resentment left. He was now satisfied, for God had communicated with him about His own person, not about Job's problems. Now Job was willing to trust the Sovereign, whose ways are perfect (Ps. 18:30), even when he could not understand. Undoubtedly God forgave him of his former sin of pride.³⁵

Notes

2.b. מַזְמָה is frequently “wicked plan, plot,” but is adequately attested in the morally neutral sense “purpose, intention, thinking” (cf. *DC*³⁶*H*, 5:209a); the negative connotations that sometimes accompany it derive from the context, not the term itself (S. Steingrimsson, *TDO*³⁷*T*, 4:88–89), so there is no problem in ascribing מַזְמָה to Yahweh. On the other hand, Habel³⁸ is tempted to find an echo of the negative sense here, with a sidelong glance to the original “scheme” of Yahweh to test Job. On the sense “private thoughts, caginess,” cf. Michael V. Fox, “Words for Wisdom: עֲצָה and בִּינָה; עֲרָמָה and תְּבוּנָה,” *ZAH* 6 (1993) 149–65 (159–60). Most modern translations have “purpose” (*RSV*³⁹*V*, *NE*⁴⁰*B*) or “plan”

³⁵ Roy B. Zuck, “[Job](#),” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 773–774.

³⁶ *DCH* Clines, D. J. A. (ed.). *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*. Vols. 1–8. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 1993–2011.

³⁷ *TDOT Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*. Ed. G. J. Botterweck, H. Ringgren, and H.-J. Fabry. Trans J. T. Willis, G. W. Bromiley, and D. E. Green. 15 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974–2006.

³⁸ Habel Habel, N. C. *The Book of Job*. OTL. London: SCM Press, 1985.

³⁹ *RSV* Revised Standard Version

⁴⁰ *NEB* New English Bible

(⁴¹NIV) or some such phrase as “what you conceive, you can perform” (⁴²JB), “nothing You propose is impossible for You” (⁴³NJPS). ⁴⁴KJV “no thought can be withholden from thee” is inappropriate. For *מַזְמָה* as the purpose of *Yahweh*, cf. Jer 23:20.

⁴⁵LXX has ἀδυνατεῖς ὅτι οὐθέν “nothing is impossible for you,” which has led some to read *מְאוּמָה* “a thing” (so Hoffman⁴⁶, Graetz⁴⁷, Bee⁴⁸ [⁴⁹B⁴⁹H⁵⁰²]) or *מָה* “anything” (Bickel⁵¹), but which is more likely to be simply an idiomatic translation of the same text as ⁵²MT. Duh⁵³ ingeniously proposed that *מַזְמָה*, which is not represented in ⁵⁴LXX, was an abbreviation of *מִי זֶה מַחְשִׁיךְ* “who is this that darkens” in 38:2; here he read *לֹא יָכֹלֶת וְכִלְיָהּ* “[I know] that you are capable, superior (*überlegen*) and nothing is [too high for you]” (explaining *בָּצַר* by Ps 139:6). But the usual rendering is entirely satisfactory.

3.c. *עלם* is “conceal,” the ⁵⁵hiph being usually employed for the active (as here). One Hebrew ⁵⁶ms has *מַחְשִׁיךְ*, in conformity with 38:2. But “conceal” is a different metaphor from “darken” even if we translate *עלם* with “obscure.” Conceivably, however, we may have here another ⁵⁷vb, *עלם* II “darken,” like *עוֹלָם* III “darkness” at 22:15 (*q.v.*⁵⁸); cf. *DC⁵⁹H*, 6:307a.

3.d. On this translation of *עצה* “plan,” see *Note* on 38:2. Some would insert *בְּמַלִּים* “by words,” which is what we have (with the form *מְלִין*) in 38:2, which Job is obviously citing here. This reading is supported

⁴¹NIV New International Version

⁴²JB Jerusalem Bible

⁴³NJPS New Jewish Publication Society Version

⁴⁴KJV King James Version, Authorized Version

⁴⁵LXX Septuagint, Greek translation of the OT

⁴⁶Hoffmann Hoffmann, J. G. E. *Hiob*. Kiel: C. F. Haeseler, 1891.

⁴⁷Graetz Graetz, Heinrich. “Lehrinhalt der ‘Weisheit’ in den biblischen Büchern.” *MGWJ* 35 (1886) 289–99, 204–10, 544–49 (pp. 402–10, 544–49 often cited as “Register der corrumptierten Stellen in Hiob und Vorschläge zur Verbesserung”).

⁴⁸Beer Beer, G. Textual notes to Job in *Biblia hebraica*. Ed. R. Kittel. 2nd ed. Stuttgart: Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1909. 1062–1112 [only mentioned when it differs from *BHK*].

⁴⁹BH Beer, G. Textual notes to Job in *Biblia hebraica*. Ed. R. Kittel. 2nd ed. Stuttgart: Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1909. 1062–1112 [only mentioned when it differs from *BHK*].

⁵⁰²Beer, G. Textual notes to Job in *Biblia hebraica*. Ed. R. Kittel. 2nd ed. Stuttgart: Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1909. 1062–1112 [only mentioned when it differs from *BHK*].

⁵¹Bickell Bickell, G. “Kritische Bearbeitung des Iobdialogs.” *WZKM* 6 (1892) 136–47, 241–57, 327–34; 7 (1893) 1–20, 153–68.

⁵²MT Masoretic Text

⁵³Duhm Duhm, B. *Das Buch Hiob erklärt*. KHC. Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1897.

⁵⁴LXX Septuagint, Greek translation of the OT

⁵⁵hiph hiphil

⁵⁶ms manuscript

⁵⁷vb verb

⁵⁸*q.v. quod vide*, which see

⁵⁹*DCH* Clines, D. J. A. (ed.). *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*. Vols. 1–8. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 1993–2011.

by LXX⁶⁰ and Pes⁶¹h, and is read by one Masoretic m⁶²s, and is adopted by Beer (BH⁶³K), Driver-Gra⁶⁴y, Kissan⁶⁵e, Sicre Día⁶⁶z, Gra⁶⁷y.

3.e. “You ask” is not in the Hebrew, but implied (added also by REB, TE⁶⁸v, and by NI⁶⁹v “You asked”).

3.f. לכן is usually “therefore” (as KJ⁷⁰v, RS⁷¹v), but that is not an appropriate link between the quotation in v 3a and Job’s own words in v 3b–c (it is omitted by NA⁷²B, J⁷³B, and effectively by NE⁷⁴B, REB “but”). לכן is

Ecclus 43:24)—which is not at all relevant to the present verse. In Ps 18 || 2 Sam 22 the v⁷⁵ שמע is nip⁷⁶h, which apparently means “obey” but is poorly attested (cf. BD⁷⁷B, 1034a §3). There is no reason to affirm that “with the hearing of the ears” means “by hearsay” (against, e.g., Dhorm⁷⁸e, Gordi⁷⁹s, de Wilde⁸⁰e; Duh⁸¹m, who gives the phrase this sense, acknowledges that this is the only place where it would have that meaning). We should note that the Hebrew here says “I heard you” (שמעתִיךָ), as NJP⁸²s,

⁶⁰LXX Septuagint, Greek translation of the OT

⁶¹Pesh Peshitta, Syriac version of the OT

⁶²ms manuscript

⁶³BHK Beer, G. Textual notes to Job in *Biblia hebraica*. Ed. R. Kittel. 3rd ed. Stuttgart: Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1937. 1105–54.

⁶⁴Driver-Gray Driver, S. R., and G. B. Gray. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Job together with a New Translation*. ICC. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1921.

⁶⁵Kissane Kissane, E. J. *The Book of Job Translated from a Critically Revised Hebrew Text with Commentary*. Dublin: Browne & Nolan, 1939.

⁶⁶Sicre Díaz Alonso Schökel, L., and J. L. Sicre Díaz. *Job, comentario teológico y literario*. Madrid: Cristiandad, 1983.

⁶⁷Gray Gray, J. *The Book of Job: A Commentary*. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2010.

⁶⁸TEV Today’s English Version [= Good News Bible]

⁶⁹NIV New International Version

⁷⁰KJV King James Version, Authorized Version

⁷¹RSV Revised Standard Version

⁷²NAB New American Bible

⁷³JB Jerusalem Bible

⁷⁴NEB New English Bible

⁷⁵vb verb

⁷⁶niph niphal

⁷⁷BDB Brown, F., S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs. *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1906.

⁷⁸Dhorme Dhorme, E. *A Commentary on the Book of Job*. Trans. H. Knight. London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1967 [original *Le livre de Job*. Paris: Gabalda, 1926].

⁷⁹Gordis Gordis, R. *The Book of Job: Commentary, New Translation, and Special Notes*. New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1978.

⁸⁰de Wilde Wilde, A. de. *Das Buch Hiob eingeleitet, übersetzt und erläutert*. OTS 22. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1981.

⁸¹Duhm Duhm, B. *Das Buch Hiob erklärt*. KHC. Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1897.

⁸²NJPS New Jewish Publication Society Version

not “I heard about you,” though most English translations say or imply that (so KJ⁸³V, RS⁸⁴V, NA⁸⁵B, NI⁸⁶V; cf. J⁸⁷B “I knew you only by hearsay,” NE⁸⁸B “I knew of thee then only by report”; similarly Moffat⁸⁹t, Dhorm⁹⁰e, Pop⁹¹e, Köni⁹²g, §22, even

“retract”; so Ehrlic⁹³h, Fohre⁹⁴r “I retract” (*ich widerrufe*), Bleeke⁹⁵r “I retract” (*herroep ik*), similarly Kroeze⁹⁶e, K⁹⁷B, 490a. (3) “reject, despise, repudiate,” and thus “have had enough of”; so “I have mourned enough” or “I have had enough of it all” (P. A. H. de Boer, “Haalt Job bakzeil? (Job xlii 6),” *NedTT*⁹⁸s 31 (1977) 181–94 [= “Does Job Retract? Job xlii 6,” in P. A. H. de Boer, *Selected Studies in Old Testament Exegesis* (ed⁹⁹. C. van Duin; OT¹⁰⁰S 27; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991) 179–95 (193–94)]).

⁸³KJV King James Version, Authorized Version

⁸⁴RSV Revised Standard Version

⁸⁵NAB New American Bible

⁸⁶NIV New International Version

⁸⁷JB Jerusalem Bible

⁸⁸NEB New English Bible

⁸⁹Moffatt Moffatt, J. *A New Translation of the Bible*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1926.

⁹⁰Dhorme Dhorme, E. *A Commentary on the Book of Job*. Trans. H. Knight. London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1967 [original *Le livre de Job*. Paris: Gabalda, 1926].

⁹¹Pope Pope, M. H. *Job*. 3rd ed. AB. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1973.

⁹²König König, E. *Hebräisches und aramäisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament, mit Einschaltung und Analyse aller schwer erkennbaren Formen, Deutung der Eigennamen sowie der massoretischen Randbemerkungen und einem deutsch-hebräischen Wortregister*. Leipzig: Dieterich'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung (Theodor Weicher), 1910.

⁹³Ehrlich Ehrlich, A. B. *Randglossen zur hebräischen Bibel*. VI. *Psalmen, Sprüche, und Hiob*. Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1918.

⁹⁴Fohrer Fohrer, G. *Das Buch Hiob*. KAT 16. Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1963.

⁹⁵Bleeker Bleeker, L. H. K. *Job*. Tekste en uitleg: Praktische Bijbelverklaring. Groningen: J. B. Wolters, 1935.

⁹⁶Kroeze Kroeze, J. H. *Het Boek Job, opnieuw uit de grondtekst vertaald en verklaard*. Korte verklaring der Heilige Schrift. Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1960.

⁹⁷KB *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti libros*. Ed. L. Koehler and W. Baumgartner. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1953.

⁹⁸*NedTTs Nederlands theologisch tijdschrift*

⁹⁹ed. edited by, edition

¹⁰⁰OTS *Oudtestamentische studiën*

Others argue that an ob¹⁰¹j, though not expressed, is understood. Such an ob¹⁰²j could be: (1) “myself” (so K¹⁰³v “I abhor myself,” Moffat¹⁰⁴t, RS¹⁰⁵v, NI¹⁰⁶v “I despise myself,” Gordi¹⁰⁷s “I abase myself”; cf. L^x¹⁰⁸x ἐφάυλισα ἑμαυτόν “I have held myself cheap,” similarly V¹⁰⁹g *ipse me reprehendo* “I rebuke myself”). (2) “my words” (so ibn Ezr¹¹⁰a, Peak¹¹¹e, Straha¹¹²n, Steuernage¹¹³l, NA¹¹⁴B “I disown what I have said,” Guillaum¹¹⁵e “I repudiate what I have said,” J¹¹⁶B “I retract all I have said”; similarly Fohre¹¹⁷r; Whybra¹¹⁸y “his earlier misapprehension”; Lester J. Kuyper, “The Repentance of Job,” V¹¹⁹T 9 [1959] 91–94; NJP¹²⁰s, Pop¹²¹e “I recant”; so too apparently HALO¹²²T, 2:540b §2a, “reject what one has said previously, revoke”). (3) “my life.” One M¹²³T m¹²⁴s (Kenn 601) actually reads יִדְּ אִמָּא “I despise, reject my life,” a phrase that occurs at 9:21 and is probably implied at 7:16. Delitzsch¹²⁵h and Köni¹²⁶g supply “my

¹⁰¹obj object

¹⁰²obj object

¹⁰³KJV King James Version, Authorized Version

¹⁰⁴Moffatt Moffatt, J. *A New Translation of the Bible*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1926.

¹⁰⁵RSV Revised Standard Version

¹⁰⁶NIV New International Version

¹⁰⁷Gordis Gordis, R. *The Book of Job: Commentary, New Translation, and Special Notes*. New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1978.

¹⁰⁸LXX Septuagint, Greek translation of the OT

¹⁰⁹Vg Vulgate

¹¹⁰ibn Ezra Commentary printed in Rabbinic Bibles (*Miqra’ot Gedolot*)

¹¹¹Peake Peake, A. S. *Job, Introduction, Revised Version with Notes, and Index*. CB. Edinburgh: T. C. & E. C. Jack, 1905.

¹¹²Strahan Strahan, J. *The Book of Job Interpreted*. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1913.

¹¹³Steuernagel Steuernagel, C. “Das Buch Hiob.” In *Die Heilige Schrift des Alten Testaments*. Ed. E. Kautzsch and A. Bertholet. 4th ed. Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1923. 2:323–89.

¹¹⁴NAB New American Bible

¹¹⁵Guillaume Guillaume, A. *Studies in the Book of Job with a New Translation*. ALUOSSup 2. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1968.

¹¹⁶JB Jerusalem Bible

¹¹⁷Fohrer Fohrer, G. *Das Buch Hiob*. KAT 16. Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1963.

¹¹⁸Whybray Whybray, Norman. *Job*. Readings. Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1998.

¹¹⁹VT *Vetus Testamentum*

¹²⁰NJPS New Jewish Publication Society Version

¹²¹Pope Pope, M. H. *Job*. 3rd ed. AB. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1973.

¹²²HALOT *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Ed. L. Koehler and W. Baumgartner. Trans. M. E. J. Richardson. 5 vols. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994–2000.

¹²³MT Masoretic Text

¹²⁴ms manuscript

¹²⁵Delitzsch Delitzsch, Franz J. *Biblical Commentary on the Book of Job*. Trans. F. Bolton. 2 vols. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1866.

¹²⁶König König, E. *Hebräisches und aramäisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament, mit Einschaltung und Analyse aller schwer erkennbaren Formen, Deutung der Eigennamen*

former activity.” (4) “my wealth.” No modern commentators accept this, but Tg has אִמָּא עֲתָרִי “I despise my wealth.” (5) “dust and ashes.” Though the phrase “upon dust and ashes” cannot be the direct ob^{127j} of the v^{128b}, Patrick regards that as the implied ob^{129j}, translating “I repudiate dust and ashes,” i.e., I forswear mourning (Dale Patrick, “The Translation of Job xlii 6,” *V^{130T}* 26 [1976] 369–71); the difficulty with this is that אִמָּא nowhere takes 6) .על. If an ob^{131j} of אִמָּא is implied, the most probable term in my opinion is מִשְׁפָּטִי “my case, my suit,” since it appears that Job is making his response within the framework of the legal dispute between himself and Yahweh; it would make perfect sense for him to acknowledge that now he is withdrawing or retracting his case. It is interesting that אִמָּא does on one occasion have מִשְׁפָּט in the sense of “case” as its ob^{132j}, at 31:13 where Job denies that he has “rejected” or “dismissed” the case of a servant. Now to dismiss someone else’s case is no doubt not the same thing as to retract one’s own, but the parallel remains striking. So too Habe^{133l}.

Another approach is to appeal to another v^{134b} אִמָּא. There is a אִמָּא II “flow, melt,” a byform of אָמַם “flow” (BD^{135B}, 549b; DC^{136H}, 5:121c; see also David A. Diewert, “Job xxxvi 5 and the Root *m*’s II,” *V^{137T}* 39 [1989] 71–77), which should be considered. This is the source of NE^{138B}’s “I melt away,” Dhorm^{139e}, Terrie¹⁴⁰ⁿ (“sink down,” *je m’abîme*). So too Buttenwiese^{141r}, Stie^{142r}, Richter, Daniel J. O’Connor, “Job’s Final Word—‘I am consoled ...’ (42:6b),” *IT^{143Q}* 50 (1983–84) 181–97 (193–94). Perhaps it should be understood with the sense “flow with tears” (as Hölsche^{144r}, de Wilde^{145e} suggest); or with the sense

sowie der massoretischen Randbemerkungen und einem deutsch-hebräischen Wortregister. Leipzig: Dieterich’sche Verlagsbuchhandlung (Theodor Weicher), 1910.

¹²⁷obj object

¹²⁸vb verb

¹²⁹obj object

¹³⁰VT *Vetus Testamentum*

¹³¹obj object

¹³²obj object

¹³³Habel Habel, N. C. *The Book of Job*. OTL. London: SCM Press, 1985.

¹³⁴vb verb

¹³⁵BDB Brown, F., S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs. *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1906.

¹³⁶DCH Clines, D. J. A. (ed.). *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*. Vols. 1–8. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 1993–2011.

¹³⁷VT *Vetus Testamentum*

¹³⁸NEB New English Bible

¹³⁹Dhorme Dhorme, E. *A Commentary on the Book of Job*. Trans. H. Knight. London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1967 [original *Le livre de Job*. Paris: Gabalda, 1926].

¹⁴⁰Terrien Terrien, S. L. “Job.” *IB*. New York and Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1954. 3:877–1198.

¹⁴¹Buttenwieser Buttenwieser, M. *The Book of Job*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1922.

¹⁴²Stier Stier, F. *Das Buch Ijob hebräisch und deutsch. Übertragen ausgelegt und mit Text- und Sacherläuterungen versehen*. Munich: Kösel, 1954.

¹⁴³ITQ *Irish Theological Quarterly*

¹⁴⁴Hölscher Hölscher, G. *Das Buch Hiob*. HAT. Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1937.

¹⁴⁵de Wilde Wilde, A. de. *Das Buch Hiob eingeleitet, übersetzt und erläutert*. OTS 22. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1981.

“abase myself” (as Hartley); or with the sense “yield,” ^{REB}; or with the sense “submit” (William Morrow, “Consolation, Rejection, and Repentance in Job 42:6,” *JB*¹⁴⁶ 105 [1986] 211–25 [214–15]). This is the interpretation followed in the *Translation* above, with the rendering “I submit.” OAM II “flow, melt” is accepted by BD¹⁴⁷B, 549b (for 7:16, not for this passage); K¹⁴⁸B, 490b (for 7:16; Ps 58:7 [8]); DC¹⁴⁹H, 5:121b (mentioning also Job 36:5 [*q.v.*¹⁵⁰]); but it is not accepted by HALO¹⁵¹T, 2:540b. This understanding is supported by LXX¹⁵² $\epsilon\tau\acute{\alpha}\kappa\eta\nu$ “I melted” (from $\tau\eta\kappa\omega$ “melt”), though we should note that LXX¹⁵³ offers a double translation: before $\epsilon\tau\acute{\alpha}\kappa\eta\nu$ it had $\epsilon\phi\alpha\upsilon\lambda\iota\sigma\alpha\ \epsilon\mu\alpha\upsilon\tau\acute{o}\nu$ (see above, and further, Morrow, “Consolation, Rejection, and Repentance in Job 42:6,” 212–13). The Qumran Tg also apparently understood OAM as “flow,” since it renders $\gamma\text{ו}\text{נ}\text{ת}\text{א}$ “I am poured out.” Perhaps Pes¹⁵⁴h ’štwq “I am silent” was also understanding OAM as “I submit.” See also the proposed emendation to OAM below. Thomas Krüger also accepts the sense of OAM as “I will waste away,” understanding that Job believes that his encounter with the deity will inevitably lead to his death (“Did Job Repent?,” in *Das Buch Hiob und seine Interpretationen: Beiträge zum Hiob-Symposium auf dem Monte Verità vom 14.–19. August 2005* [ed.¹⁵⁵ Thomas Krüger, Manfred Oeming, Konrad Schmid, and Christoph Uehlinger; ATAN¹⁵⁶T 88; Zurich: Theologische Verlag Zürich, 2007] 217–29).

Emendations have also been proposed, of course. (1) One of these simply involves reading OAM “I melt,” from OOM “melt,” which has the same effect as taking OAM from the v¹⁵⁷b OAM II “melt.” The verb is used at 2 Sam 17:10, where a valiant man melts with fear, and at Isa 10:18, where OQI OOM means “the melting of a sick person,” which G. R. Driver, “Isaiah i–xxxix: Textual and Linguistic Problems,” *JS*¹⁵⁸ 13 (1968) 36–57 (41–42), suggests means “the collapse of a person in convulsions” (NE¹⁵⁹B “as when a man falls in a fit”) (the finite v¹⁶⁰b is OOI IV, perhaps cognate with Akk. *nasāsu* “wail, moan” [CD¹⁶¹A, 243a]; cf.

¹⁴⁶*JBL Journal of Biblical Literature*

¹⁴⁷BDB Brown, F., S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs. *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1906.

¹⁴⁸KB *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti libros*. Ed. L. Koehler and W. Baumgartner. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1953.

¹⁴⁹DCH Clines, D. J. A. (ed.). *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*. Vols. 1–8. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 1993–2011.

¹⁵⁰*q.v. quod vide*, which see

¹⁵¹HALOT *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Ed. L. Koehler and W. Baumgartner. Trans. M. E. J. Richardson. 5 vols. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994–2000.

¹⁵²LXX Septuagint, Greek translation of the OT

¹⁵³LXX Septuagint, Greek translation of the OT

¹⁵⁴Pesh Peshitta, Syriac version of the OT

¹⁵⁵ed. edited by, edition

¹⁵⁶ATANT *Abhandlungen zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments*

¹⁵⁷vb verb

¹⁵⁸JSS *Journal of Semitic Studies*

¹⁵⁹NEB New English Bible

¹⁶⁰vb verb

¹⁶¹CDA *A Concise Dictionary of Akkadian*. Ed. J. Black, A. George, and N. Postgate. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2000.

DC¹⁶²H, 5:701b). Similarly Terrie¹⁶³n, translating “I sink into the abyss” (*The Iconography of Job through the Centuries: Artists as Biblical Interpreters* [University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996] 219). (2) A variant on this suggestion is that of Böttche¹⁶⁴r, סמך סמך “I must pine away” (from סמך “dissolve, melt”), as at 2 Sam 17:10. Beer (*BH*¹⁶⁵K) likewise read סמך סמך “I melt.” (3) De Wild¹⁶⁶e would read סמך סמך “I strongly reject myself” (nip¹⁶⁷h in¹⁶⁸f and imp¹⁶⁹f of סמך), which he translates “I recognize my nothingness” (the nip¹⁷⁰h in¹⁷¹f should, however, be סמך or סמך); see also his “Jobs slotwoord,” *NedTT*¹⁷²s 32 (1978) 265–69. Although de Wild¹⁷³e says that the nip¹⁷⁴h makes the v¹⁷⁵b reflexive, all the occurrences of סמך nip¹⁷⁶h (three in Hebrew Bible, six in Ecclesiasticus, one in Qumran) are passive, “be rejected, despised” (DC¹⁷⁷H, 5:121b). (4) Gra¹⁷⁸y prefers, ingeniously, calling upon the double rendering of ל¹⁷⁹x (ἐφάυλισα ἑμαυτόν, “I have abased myself,” and ἑτάκην, “I have melted”; a not dissimilar double rendering in the Qumran Tg) to read סמך סמך “I demean myself and yield, lit¹⁸⁰. melt,” the first v¹⁸¹b being from סמך and the second from סמך.

¹⁶²DC H Clines, D. J. A. (ed.). *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*. Vols. 1–8. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 1993–2011.

¹⁶³Terrien Terrien, S. L. “Job.” *IB*. New York and Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1954. 3:877–1198.

¹⁶⁴Böttcher Böttcher, F. *Neue exegetisch-kritische Aehrenlese zum Alten Testamente*. Leipzig: J. A. Barth, 1863–1865.

¹⁶⁵BHK Beer, G. Textual notes to Job in *Biblia hebraica*. Ed. R. Kittel. 3rd ed. Stuttgart: Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1937. 1105–54.

¹⁶⁶De Wilde Wilde, A. de. *Das Buch Hiob eingeleitet, übersetzt und erläutert*. OTS 22. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1981.

¹⁶⁷niph niphāl

¹⁶⁸inf infinitive

¹⁶⁹impf imperfect

¹⁷⁰niph niphāl

¹⁷¹inf infinitive

¹⁷²NedTTs *Nederlands theologisch tijdschrift*

¹⁷³de Wilde Wilde, A. de. *Das Buch Hiob eingeleitet, übersetzt und erläutert*. OTS 22. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1981.

¹⁷⁴niph niphāl

¹⁷⁵vb verb

¹⁷⁶niph niphāl

¹⁷⁷DC H Clines, D. J. A. (ed.). *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*. Vols. 1–8. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 1993–2011.

¹⁷⁸Gray Gray, J. *The Book of Job: A Commentary*. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2010.

¹⁷⁹Lxx Septuagint, Greek translation of the OT

¹⁸⁰lit. literally, literal

¹⁸¹vb verb

Another set of emendations aims at providing an ob¹⁸²j for the v¹⁸³b אִמָּאס, understood as “I despise, reject.” Thus (1) Budd¹⁸⁴e proposes אָשַׁר דְּבַרְתִּי “what I have said” after אִמָּאס “I reject (?)”, which is both prosaic (“insipid” he called it himself in his second edition) and not without its own problems (see *Comment*). This proposal seems to be followed by Driver-Gra¹⁸⁵y. (2) עַל כָּל־דְּבָרִי “concerning all my words” (Tur-Sina¹⁸⁶i), which he understands as the ob¹⁸⁷j both of אִמָּאס and of לְעוֹתִי (3) נַחֲמָתִי “my stammering” (Bickel¹⁸⁸i, Budd¹⁸⁹e¹⁹⁰²). (4) נִמְרָצָתִי “my violence,” a dubious form (Cheyn¹⁹¹e, Budd¹⁹²e¹⁹³² [ve/]). (5) Kissan¹⁹⁴e thinks that “my words” or “my folly” have dropped out of the text, but he is so uncertain that he renders simply “I repudiate...”

6.c. nip¹⁹⁵h is (1) “regret, be sorry, repent, relent,” (2) “be moved to pity, have compassion,” (3) “comfort oneself, be comforted, be consoled” (*DC*¹⁹⁶H, 5:663a) (although the form נַחֲמָתִי could equally well be piel, which is almost always “comfort, console,” the piel does not make sense in the context).

¹⁸²obj object

¹⁸³vb verb

¹⁸⁴Budde Budde, K. *Das Buch Hiob übersetzt und erklärt*. HAT 2/1. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1896.

¹⁸⁵Driver-Gray Driver, S. R., and G. B. Gray. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Job together with a New Translation*. ICC. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1921.

¹⁸⁶Tur-Sinai Tur-Sinai, N. H. *The Book of Job, A New Commentary*. Jerusalem: Kiryath-Sepher, 1957.

¹⁸⁷obj object

¹⁸⁸Bickell Bickell, G. “Kritische Bearbeitung des Iobdialogs.” *WZKM* 6 (1892) 136–47, 241–57, 327–34; 7 (1893) 1–20, 153–68.

¹⁸⁹Budde Budde, K. *Das Buch Hiob übersetzt und erklärt*. 2nd ed. HAT 2/1. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1913.

¹⁹⁰²Budde, K. *Das Buch Hiob übersetzt und erklärt*. 2nd ed. HAT 2/1. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1913.

¹⁹¹Cheyne Cheyne, T. K. *Job and Solomon, or the Wisdom of the Old Testament*. London: Kegan Paul, Trench & Co., 1887.

¹⁹²Budde Budde, K. *Das Buch Hiob übersetzt und erklärt*. 2nd ed. HAT 2/1. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1913.

¹⁹³²Budde, K. *Das Buch Hiob übersetzt und erklärt*. 2nd ed. HAT 2/1. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1913.

¹⁹⁴Kissane Kissane, E. J. *The Book of Job Translated from a Critically Revised Hebrew Text with Commentary*. Dublin: Browne & Nolan, 1939.

¹⁹⁵niph niphal

¹⁹⁶*DCH* Clines, D. J. A. (ed.). *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*. Vols. 1–8. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 1993–2011.

(1) The sense “repent” has been the traditional translation (so KJ¹⁹⁷_V, RS¹⁹⁸_V, NA¹⁹⁹_B, J²⁰⁰_B, NI²⁰¹_V, NE²⁰²_B, Moffat²⁰³_t, Dhorm²⁰⁴_e, Kissan²⁰⁵_e, Pop²⁰⁶_e; BD²⁰⁷_B, 637a §2; K²⁰⁸_B, 608b §3; HALO²⁰⁹_T, 2:688b §1c). םנן nip²¹⁰_h in the sense “repent” is frequently used absolutely, i.e., without a following phrase indicating what is being repented of; so Exod 13:17; 1 Sam 15:29; Jer 4:28; 20:16; Ezek 24:14; Jonah 3:9; Joel 2:14; Zech 8:14; Pss 106:45; 110:4. In all these cases it is Yahweh who is “repenting,” i.e., changing his mind, about planned evil. Only in Jer 31:19 is the v²¹¹_b used of a human (“after I had turned away, I repented”), which does seem to concern repentance in the usual sense. However, the translation “repent” is in most cases inappropriate, and it would be better to understand it as “retract a declared action,” as H. Van Dyke Parunak puts it (“A Semantic Survey of *NH̄M*,” *Bi²¹²b* 56 [1975] 512–32). Thus NJP²¹³_s “I recant and relent,” Hartley “I recant”; Tur-Sina²¹⁴_i thinks it is rather “repent and cease doing.” Janzen prefers “I change my mind.”

(2) The sense “be moved to pity” is inappropriate here.

(3) The sense “be comforted, be consoled” is well attested, at Gen 24:67; 2 Sam 13:39; Ezek 14:22; 31:16; 32:31; Eccus 38:17, 23; 1Q²¹⁵_H 14:17; 17:13; 4QBar²¹⁶_k^{217a}1.1.1. Of special interest are Gen 38:12 where it refers to a point in time after the death of Judah’s wife when he “is consoled,” i.e., has completed his period of mourning, and Jer 31:15, where Rachel “refuses to be comforted,” i.e., to accept the consolation a mourner would usually receive (the same language in Ps 77:2 [3]). With that as a background, it is possible to see Job here as “accepting consolation,” i.e., deciding that his period of

¹⁹⁷_{KJV} King James Version, Authorized Version

¹⁹⁸_{RSV} Revised Standard Version

¹⁹⁹_{NAB} New American Bible

²⁰⁰_{JB} Jerusalem Bible

²⁰¹_{NIV} New International Version

²⁰²_{NEB} New English Bible

²⁰³ Moffatt Moffatt, J. *A New Translation of the Bible*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1926.

²⁰⁴ Dhorme Dhorme, E. *A Commentary on the Book of Job*. Trans. H. Knight. London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1967 [original *Le livre de Job*. Paris: Gabalda, 1926].

²⁰⁵ Kissane Kissane, E. J. *The Book of Job Translated from a Critically Revised Hebrew Text with Commentary*. Dublin: Browne & Nolan, 1939.

²⁰⁶ Pope Pope, M. H. *Job*. 3rd ed. AB. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1973.

²⁰⁷ BDB Brown, F., S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs. *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1906.

²⁰⁸ KB *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti libros*. Ed. L. Koehler and W. Baumgartner. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1953.

²⁰⁹ HALOT *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Ed. L. Koehler and W. Baumgartner. Trans. M. E. J. Richardson. 5 vols. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994–2000.

²¹⁰ niph niphāl

²¹¹ vb verb

²¹² *Bib Biblica*

²¹³ NJPS New Jewish Publication Society Version

²¹⁴ Tur-Sinai Tur-Sinai, N. H. *The Book of Job, A New Commentary*. Jerusalem: Kiryath-Sepher, 1957.

²¹⁵ 1QH *Hymn Scroll* from Qumran

²¹⁶ 4QBark *Barkhi Nafshi*^a (4Q434)

^{217a} *Barkhi Nafshi*^a (4Q434)

mourning has come to an end (so also de Boer, “Haalt Job bakzeil? (Job xlii 6),” “comfort oneself after a period of mourning,” i.e., desist from it, leave it behind; see on סאמ above). Now that he has abandoned his lawsuit with Yahweh, he is ready to return to normal life. The translation “I am consoled” is also favored by O’Connor, “Job’s Final Word,” 181, 195.

A different approach is that of Hölsche²¹⁸, who understands נחם as “sigh,” in line with the sense of the Arab²¹⁹. *naḥama* (the word is unknown to Freytag²²⁰ and Lan²²¹, while Wehr-Cowa²²², 948a, renders “clear one’s throat; wheeze, pant, gasp”; so it is by no means clear that the Arab²²³. word means “sigh”). The Qumran Tg has אנא “I shall become [dust and ashes].” Emendations of נחם are rare: (1) Tur-Sina²²⁴, while retaining נחמתי, thought it concealed another word also, וְנִחְתִּי “and I shall go down [to dust and ashes],” from נחתי “go down”; but a longing for death at this point seems unlikely. (2) Gra²²⁵, taking a hint from the Qumran Tg with its rendering ואתמהא “and I am diluted,” reads here וְנִמְהָאֲתִי “I am reduced [to dust and ashes],” supposing a Heb²²⁶. מהא “dilute” cognate with Aram²²⁷. מהא; the root, Pop²²⁸ notes, is attested in M²²⁹H in the sense “dissolve, dilute, make threadbare (of clothes)” (Jastro²³⁰, 736b), and has an Arab²³¹. cognate *mahā* “beat violently, be thin and watery”; it may perhaps be the same word as Aram²³². מחי “rub, wipe out, destroy, dissolve” (Jastro²³³, 759a) and perhaps also

²¹⁸Hölscher Hölscher, G. *Das Buch Hiob*. HAT. Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1937.

²¹⁹Arab. Arabic

²²⁰Freytag Freytag, G. W. *Lexicon arabico-latinum praesertim ex Djauharii Firuzabaiique et aliorum Arabum operibus adhibitis Golii quoque et aliorum libris confectum*. Halle: C. A. Schwetschke & Filius, 1830–1837.

²²¹Lane Lane, E. W. *An Arabic–English Lexicon*. London: Williams & Norgate, 1863–1893.

²²²Wehr-Cowan Wehr, Hans. *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*. Ed. J. Milton Cowan. Beirut: Librarie du Liban, 1980.

²²³Arab. Arabic

²²⁴Tur-Sinai Tur-Sinai, N. H. *The Book of Job, A New Commentary*. Jerusalem: Kiryath-Sepher, 1957.

²²⁵Gray Gray, J. *The Book of Job: A Commentary*. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2010.

²²⁶Heb. Hebrew

²²⁷Aram. Aramaic

²²⁸Pope Pope, M. H. *Job*. 3rd ed. AB. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1973.

²²⁹MH Mishnaic Hebrew

²³⁰Jastrow Jastrow, M. *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature*. London: Luzac, 1903.

²³¹Arab. Arabic

²³²Aram. Aramaic

²³³Jastrow Jastrow, M. *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature*. London: Luzac, 1903.

the common Semitic *mḥṣ* “strike, slay” (Akk. *maḥaṣu* [*CD*²³⁴A, 190a], Ugar²³⁵. *mḥṣ* [*DU*²³⁶L, 541], Heb²³⁷. מַחֵשׁ); cf. M. Held, “*mḥṣ*/**imḥṣ* in Ugaritic and Other Semitic Languages (A Study in Comparative Lexicography),” *JAO*²³⁸S 79 (1959) 169–76 (171 n. 37). This is an intelligent proposal, but not to be preferred to the מ²³⁹ַחמתי understood as “I accept consolation.”

6.d. On the possible nuances of עַל, see the next *Note*. Here it is only reported that Al Wolters, “»A child of dust and ashes« (Job 42,6b),” *ZA*²⁴⁰W 102 (1990) 116–19, offers the original suggestion that, against all previous interpreters, עַל is not to be taken as the prep, but as the attested noun עֶל “child,” as at Isa 49:15; 65:20 (BD²⁴¹B, 732a). It is supportive of this view that עַל “upon” at 24:9 is emended by most to the same word עֶל (or עוֹל). Wolters also claims the support of the Tg, which reads “I comfort myself for my children (מבניי) who are dust and ashes,” observing that the מ²⁴²ַח has no word for “child, children” unless such is the meaning of עַל. The difficulty with the last point is that if the Tg understood עַל as “child, children” they could not have translated “comforted myself for,” since the “for” would require that עַל be understood as the prep עַל; one would have to postulate that the text originally had something like עַל עַל, which would be decidedly odd. The other problem is that in its other occurrences עֶל fairly clearly means “suckling” (as BD²⁴³B, 732a), being derived from עוֹל “give suck.” Wolters demurs that Hebrew children were not weaned until the age of three or four, but even so there are no parallels for an adult being spoken of, even metaphorically, as an עַל. The case of עוֹלָל, עוֹלָל “child” is perhaps not relevant, since it seems to be connected with a quite different root (so BD²⁴⁴B, 760b; K²⁴⁵B, 688a, and HALO²⁴⁶T, 2:798a, however, connect it with עוֹל “give suck”).

6.e. על-עפר ואפר “upon dust and ashes” has been variously understood as “[I repent while sitting] upon dust and ashes” (Driver-Gra²⁴⁷y), or “[I console myself for my sins], who am dust and ashes” (Tg), or

²³⁴*CDA A Concise Dictionary of Akkadian*. Ed. J. Black, A. George, and N. Postgate. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2000.

²³⁵Ugar. Ugaritic

²³⁶*DUL Olmo Lete, G. del, and J. Sanmartín. A Dictionary of the Ugaritic Language in the Alphabetic Tradition*. 2nd ed. Leiden: Brill, 2004.

²³⁷Heb. Hebrew

²³⁸*JAOS Journal of the American Oriental Society*

²³⁹MT Masoretic Text

²⁴⁰*ZAW Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*

²⁴¹BDB Brown, F., S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs. *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1906.

²⁴²MT Masoretic Text

²⁴³BDB Brown, F., S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs. *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1906.

²⁴⁴BDB Brown, F., S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs. *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1906.

²⁴⁵*KB Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti libros*. Ed. L. Koehler and W. Baumgartner. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1953.

²⁴⁶*HALOT The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Ed. L. Koehler and W. Baumgartner. Trans. M. E. J. Richardson. 5 vols. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994–2000.

²⁴⁷Driver-Gray Driver, S. R., and G. B. Gray. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Job together with a New Translation*. ICC. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1921.

“[I console myself] for dust and ashes” (Mer²⁴⁸x), “[I comfort myself and am content that] dust and ashes [are my portion]” (Bickel^{249|2503}), “I will repent unto dust and ashes,” i.e., until death (Szczygie²⁵¹l), “[sinking down] upon dust and dirt” (as a ritual act of self-abasement) (Charles A. Muenchow, “Dust and Dirt in Job 42:6,” *JB*²⁵²L 108 [1989] 597–611). The Tg, as mentioned in the previous *Note*, had “I comfort myself for my sons, who are dust and ashes.” Most translations have “I repent in dust and ashes” (KJ²⁵³V, RS²⁵⁴V, NA²⁵⁵B, J²⁵⁶B, NI²⁵⁷V, NE²⁵⁸B), which can only suggest that dust and ashes are being regarded as clothing and that the phrase is analogous to “in sackcloth and ashes.” This translation is almost certainly wrong, since על must denote what Job is (in some sense) “upon,” not what is “upon” Job.

The phrase על דם is often translated “repent for”; so at Exod 32:12, 14; 2 Sam 24:16 (ms²⁵⁹s); 1 Chr 21:15; Jer 18:8; 26:3 (ms²⁶⁰s), 13 (ms²⁶¹s); Joel 2:13; Jonah 3:10; 4:2 (all of Yahweh “repenting” of harm he has been planning); similarly Amos 7:3, 6 (though here the term רעה “evil” is not used); and also Isa 57:6 (apparently of Yahweh “relenting”); Jer 18:10 (of Yahweh repenting of *good* he is about to do). As has been noted above, “repent” seems an inappropriate term for what is essentially a change of plan on Yahweh’s part. Only in one case, in Jer 8:6, is the phrase used of a human “repenting” of wickedness; but that would not seem to be relevant here, for Job can hardly be repenting of his dust and ashes since they are nothing to be ashamed of.

Patrick, however, followed by Habe²⁶²l, thinks that is exactly what the phrase means, translating “I repent of dust and ashes,” i.e., he forsakes his position of lamentation among the dust and ashes and forswears remorse (Dale Patrick, “The Translation of Job xlii 6,” *V*²⁶³T 26 [1976] 369–71; similarly Thomas F. Dailey, “And Yet He Repents—On Job 42,6,” *ZA*²⁶⁴W 105 [1993] 205–9). L. J. Kaplan points out that

²⁴⁸Merx Merx, A. *Das Gedicht von Hiob. Hebräischer Text, kritisch bearbeitet und übersetzt, nebst sachlicher und kritischer Einleitung*. Jena: Mauke’s Verlag (Hermann Dufft), 1871.

²⁴⁹Bickell Bickell, G. *Das Buch Job nach Anleitung der Strophik und der Septuaginta auf seine ursprüngliche Form zurückgeführt und in Versmasse des Urtextes übersetzt*. Vienna: Carl Gerold’s Sohn, 1894.

²⁵⁰³Bickell, G. *Das Buch Job nach Anleitung der Strophik und der Septuaginta auf seine ursprüngliche Form zurückgeführt und in Versmasse des Urtextes übersetzt*. Vienna: Carl Gerold’s Sohn, 1894.

²⁵¹Szczygiel Szczygiel, P. *Das Buch Job, übersetzt und erklärt*. HSAT. Bonn: Hanstein, 1931.

²⁵²*JBL Journal of Biblical Literature*

²⁵³KJV King James Version, Authorized Version

²⁵⁴RSV Revised Standard Version

²⁵⁵NAB New American Bible

²⁵⁶JB Jerusalem Bible

²⁵⁷NIV New International Version

²⁵⁸NEB New English Bible

²⁵⁹mss manuscripts

²⁶⁰mss manuscripts

²⁶¹mss manuscripts

²⁶²Habel Habel, N. C. *The Book of Job*. OTL. London: SCM Press, 1985.

²⁶³VT *Vetus Testamentum*

²⁶⁴ZAW *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*

Maimonides had the same understanding (“Maimonides, Dale Patrick, and Job xlii 6,” *V²⁶⁵T* 18 [1978] 356–58). Along the same track is the interpretation “I have changed my mind concerning” (Whybra²⁶⁶y; this seems also to be Newso²⁶⁷m’s preferred interpretation). Such an interpretation fails to carry conviction, however. For the rituals of mourning are a wholly appropriate response to bereavement, and are nothing to be repented of, or even changing one’s mind about; when they come to an end, it is because a new phase of life is being entered upon, not because the mourning has been in any way rejected.

The *Translation* above, “I accept consolation for my dust and ashes,” does not adopt the sense “repent” or even “change one’s mind,” but rather depends on the attestations of the phrase *נחם על* as “comfort oneself for, be comforted for.” It occurs also in v 11, and at 2 Sam 13:39 (David for Amnon); Jer 31:15 (Rachel refuses to be comforted for her children); Ezek 32:31 (Pharaoh comforted for his slain army); 14:22 (Jerusalem comforted for the evil Yahweh has brought on it); Isa 22:4 (the mourner comforted for the destruction of the city); similarly 1 Chr 19:2 (|| 2 Sam 10:2 has *אל* rather than *על*); Jer 16:7; 31:15; Ezek 14:22; 32:31; 1Q²⁶⁸H 14:7; 17:13; 4QBar²⁶⁹k^{270a} 1.1.1 (*DC²⁷¹H*, 5:663b). Job is announcing that he is ending his period of mourning (see further, *Comment*).

An emendation was proposed by T. K. Cheyn²⁷²e (*E²⁷³B* 2:2481), *“המס אמס ונמקתי”*, “I must pine away [from *מסס*], and dissolve [to dust and ashes]”; *על* could only be suitable here if it is regarded as equivalent to *אל*. *LX²⁷⁴* has *ἡγημαι δὲ ἐγὼ ἐμᾶσθον γῆν καὶ σποδόν* “and I think myself earth and ashes,” but, as Driver-Gray²⁷⁵ say, “it is doubtful whether this is anything but a paraphrase of [*M²⁷⁶T*].” In the same vein, Houtsma²⁷⁷a proposes reading *נמשלתי על-עפר ואפר* “I liken myself to dust and dirt [see below on the exact translation of *אפר*].” De Wilde²⁷⁸e followed the same track with his proposal *“נחשבתי”* “I regard myself [as dust and dirt].”

The Qumran Tg’s *ואתמהא* “and I am boiled up” apparently read *נחמתי* as if derived from *המם* “be hot.”

²⁶⁵*VT Vetus Testamentum*

²⁶⁶Whybray Whybray, Norman. *Job*. Readings. Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1998.

²⁶⁷Newsom Newsom, Carol A. “The Book of Job.” In *The New Interpreter’s Bible*. Ed. Leander E. Keck et al. Vol. 4. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996. 317–637.

²⁶⁸1QH *Hymn Scroll* from Qumran

²⁶⁹4QBark *Barkhi Nafshi^a* (4Q434)

^{270a}*Barkhi Nafshi^a* (4Q434)

²⁷¹*DCH* Clines, D. J. A. (ed.). *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*. Vols. 1–8. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 1993–2011.

²⁷²Cheyne Cheyne, T. K. *Job and Solomon, or the Wisdom of the Old Testament*. London: Kegan Paul, Trench & Co., 1887.

²⁷³*EB Encyclopaedia biblica*. Ed. T. K. Cheyne and J. Sutherland Black. London: A. & C. Black, 1899–1903.

²⁷⁴*LXX* Septuagint, Greek translation of the OT

²⁷⁵Driver-Gray Driver, S. R., and G. B. Gray. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Job together with a New Translation*. ICC. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1921.

²⁷⁶*MT* Masoretic Text

²⁷⁷Houtsma Houtsma, M. T. *Textkritische Studien zum Alten Testament*. I. *Das Buch Hiob*. Leiden: Brill, 1925.

²⁷⁸De Wilde Wilde, A. de. *Das Buch Hiob eingeleitet, übersetzt und erläutert*. OTS 22. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1981.

עפר ואפר “dust and ashes” is commonly thought to be a term for the refuse-heap (*mezcala*) on which Job is sitting in 2:8 (the same phrase in Ecclus 40:7 [3]). However, it does not seem that one sits both on dust and on ashes, for the normal rituals of mourning are apparently to have dust on the head and to sit in ashes: so typically Ezek 27:30 “they cast dust on their heads and wallow in ashes,” while in Job 2:8, 12 Job sits “among” ashes while his friends put dust upon their heads; from Isa 58:5 we gather that on a fast day one would spread sackcloth and ashes under one, and from Jer 6:26 that mourning involves rolling in ashes (cf. lying in ashes in Esth 4:3); from Neh 9:1 that a national ritual of mourning would involve “earth” (אדמה) upon the head. The evidence does not, however, all run in one direction: in 2 Sam 13:19 Tamar puts ashes on her *head* (as also in Jdt 4:11 of Jerusalemites), while in Mic 1:10 mourners roll in *dust*, not ashes. It is hard to say exactly what is meant when in Esth 4:1 Mordecai “puts on” sackcloth and ashes; are the ashes on the sackcloth? The phrase “sackcloth and ashes” occurs as well at *T. Jos*²⁷⁹ *s*²⁸⁰. 15:2; Luke 10:13; Matt 11:21. But as a whole, the evidence suggests that על-עפר ואפר is unlikely to mean “[sitting] upon dust and ashes.”

The picture becomes more complicated when we review the terms more closely. Perhaps the word פלט is not the usual פלט I “roll one (in)” (as BD²⁸¹B, 814a; HALO²⁸²T, 2:935b) but a פלט III “sprinkle,” cognate with Ugar²⁸³. *pl̥* (though DU²⁸⁴L, 673, thinks the word means “humiliation”), as G. R. Driver argues for Jer 6:26; 25:34; Ezek 27:30; Mic 1:10 (“Ezekiel: Linguistic and Textual Problems,” *Bi*²⁸⁵b 35 [1954] 145–59, 299–312 [157–58]; so too Mayer I. Gruber, *Aspects of Nonverbal Communication in the Ancient Near East* [Studia Pohl 12; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1980] 457–58, who cites Umberto Cassuto as the first proponent of this idea, in his “The Death of Ba’al [Table I*A²⁸⁶B from Ras-Shamra,” *Tar*²⁸⁷b 12 [1941] 179). And perhaps also the word יצע “lay, spread out” (BD²⁸⁸B, 426b; HALO²⁸⁹T, 2:428a) does not necessarily refer to what is *beneath* one, in which case Esth 4:3 may mean, literally, that sackcloth and ashes were “spread” for many (יצע לרבים) *over their heads*. Isa 58:5, we may note, does not specifically say that the sackcloth and ashes are *under* the penitents, despite the translations. If these suggestions are correct, only Job 2:8, 12 would be left, of the passages mentioned in the previous paragraph, to suggest that sitting on ashes is a normal mourning custom; and it can easily be argued that Job’s is a special case, since he is sitting on the town refuse heap anyway, where ashes are usually disposed of. What is clear is that על-עפר ואפר is unlikely to mean “upon dust” in a locative sense.

If then the phrase does not mean “[sitting] upon dust and ashes,” it could satisfactorily mean “[consoled] for (my) dust and ashes, i.e., the symbols of mourning I must necessarily surround myself

²⁷⁹*T. Jos Testament of Joseph*

²⁸⁰. *Testament of Joseph*

²⁸¹BDB Brown, F., S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs. *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1906.

²⁸²HALOT *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Ed. L. Koehler and W. Baumgartner. Trans. M. E. J. Richardson. 5 vols. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994–2000.

²⁸³Ugar. Ugaritic

²⁸⁴DUL Olmo Lete, G. del, and J. Sanmartín. *A Dictionary of the Ugaritic Language in the Alphabetic Tradition*. 2nd ed. Leiden: Brill, 2004.

²⁸⁵*Bib Biblica*

²⁸⁶AB Anchor Bible

²⁸⁷*Tarb Tarbiz*

²⁸⁸BDB Brown, F., S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs. *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1906.

²⁸⁹HALOT *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Ed. L. Koehler and W. Baumgartner. Trans. M. E. J. Richardson. 5 vols. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994–2000.

with.” On mourning rituals, see further E. Kutsch, “ ‘Trauerbräuche’ und ‘Selbstminderungsriten’ im Alten Testament,” in Kurt Lühti, Ernst Kutsch, and Wilhelm Dautine, *Drei Wiener Antrittsreden* (Theologische Studien 78; Zurich: EVZ-Verlag, 1965) 25–37 (= his *Kleine Schriften zum Alten Testament* [ed.²⁹⁰. Ludwig Schmidt; BZA²⁹¹W 168; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1986] 78–95). See further, *Comment*.

We should note that the traditional translation of עפר ואפר as “dust and ashes” is in any case by no means assured, though it is accepted in the *Translation* above. BD²⁹²B, 68a, is clear that the term אפר means “ashes,” doubtfully connecting the word with an Arab²⁹³. cognate *ʾafara* “leap” (Freyta²⁹⁴g, 1:43a, but the word has many other meanings also; it is not in Lan²⁹⁵e) as describing ashes, and noting first Num 19:9, 10, concerning the disposal of the ashes of the red heifer. Many other authorities, however, regard אפר as equivalent in meaning to the first word of the phrase, עפר “dust, earth,” to which it is said to be related etymologically; K²⁹⁶B, 79a, for example, gives the meaning as “dust,” with a sense “ashes” noted only for Num 19:9, 10 (the red heifer). HALO²⁹⁷T, 1:80a, adds, with a question mark, Ezek 28:18, where the king of Tyre is consumed by fire and turned to ashes (Ge²⁹⁸s¹²⁹⁹⁸, 90a, and TLO³⁰⁰T, 2:940, also accept only these two passages for the sense “ashes”). According to Zorell³⁰¹I, 75b, only Num 19:9, 10 and Ezek 28:18 are certainly “ashes,” while only Mal 4:3 (3:21) is certainly “dust” (though even here RS³⁰²V, NA³⁰³B,

²⁹⁰ed. edited by, edition

²⁹¹BZAW Beihefte zur ZAW

²⁹²BDB Brown, F., S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs. *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1906.

²⁹³Arab. Arabic

²⁹⁴Freytag Freytag, G. W. *Lexicon arabico-latinum praesertim ex Djauharii Firuzabaique et aliorum Arabum operibus adhibitis Golii quoque et aliorum libris confectum*. Halle: C. A. Schwetschke & Filius, 1830–1837.

²⁹⁵Lane Lane, E. W. *An Arabic–English Lexicon*. London: Williams & Norgate, 1863–1893.

²⁹⁶KB *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti libros*. Ed. L. Koehler and W. Baumgartner. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1953.

²⁹⁷HALOT *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Ed. L. Koehler and W. Baumgartner. Trans. M. E. J. Richardson. 5 vols. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994–2000.

²⁹⁸Ges *Wilhelm Gesenius Hebräisches und aramäisches Handwörterbuch über das Alte Testament*. Ed. R. Meyer and H. Donner, with U. Rüterworden. 18th ed. 6 vols. Berlin: Springer Verlag, 1987–2010.

²⁹⁹¹⁸ *Wilhelm Gesenius Hebräisches und aramäisches Handwörterbuch über das Alte Testament*. Ed. R. Meyer and H. Donner, with U. Rüterworden. 18th ed. 6 vols. Berlin: Springer Verlag, 1987–2010.

³⁰⁰TLOT *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Ed. E. Jenni and C. Westermann. Trans. M. E. Biddle. 3 vols. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997 [translation of *THWAT*].

³⁰¹Zorell Zorell, Franz. *Lexicon hebraicum et aramaicum Veteris Testamenti*. Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1984 (original 1946).

³⁰²RSV Revised Standard Version

³⁰³NAB New American Bible

NI³⁰⁴V, J³⁰⁵B, NE³⁰⁶B are happy with “ashes”). De Wild³⁰⁷e thinks that Lam 3:16 is also a clear example of the sense “dust,” though here RS³⁰⁸V has “made me cower in ashes” and NE³⁰⁹B “fed on ashes.” The same is argued by Gruber, *Aspects of Nonverbal Communication*, 457–58, and Muenchow, “Dust and Dirt in Job 42:6,” 608. A strong support for the sense “ashes” in all the uses of אפר is Ezek 27:30 where mourners put אפר on their heads and “roll about” (פלו) in, or “sprinkle,” עפר; if the two terms were equivalent, the line would be rather tautologous, though some might argue that it simply displays strict parallelism.

As for the two terms together, עפר ואפר, we should also note the special use referring to the composition of the human frame (Gen 18:27; Ecclus 10:9; 1Q³¹⁰H 18:5; 4Q266 [4QD^a] fr. 1 a–b.22–23; 4Q227 [4QpsJub^c] fr. 7.ii.16 [Job 30:19 and Ecclus 40:7 do not belong here]). Whether we understand the phrase as “dust and ashes” or “thoroughly dust” (K³¹¹B, 79b) it can hardly be relevant to the present passage, for it does not seem to be Job’s frailty or mortality that is the issue. NJP³¹²S “I recant and relent, being but dust and ashes” is worth considering, nevertheless; presumably על would have to be understood as standing for על-אשר “on account of the fact that.” But if this were the meaning one would have expected על-אפר ואפר “in that I am dust and ashes.” Some others have argued that the phrase simply signifies humility or humiliation (Whybra³¹³y); but that does not explain the prep על. Newsom³¹⁴m thinks of “a consolation concerning the human condition,” but it is not easy to see Job speaking here on behalf of humanity.

Form/Structure/Setting

This short speech, though longer than Job’s previous speech (40:4–5), obviously constitutes a single strophe. Its *structure* is threefold: (1) Job acknowledges the omnipotence of Yahweh (v 2), (2) he accepts that he has intruded into an area in which he has no competence (v 3), and (3) having heard Yahweh’s speeches, he abandons his case against God and determines to resume his normal life (vv 4–6). The second and third elements each begin with a quotation of words of Yahweh, to which Job responds. The first element does not begin with a quotation, and so may be seen as Job’s response to the divine speeches as a whole, which have just now concluded.

The *genre* of the speech is, unsurprisingly, that of the *legal disputation*, though there is not very much of its typical language. In the quotation of Yahweh’s words in v 4, there are the common terms “listen,” “speak,” “question,” and “answer,” which all belong in that setting. One important legal term occurs in v 3, where I have translated הגדתי “I made my depositions” (נגד).

³⁰⁴NIV New International Version

³⁰⁵JB Jerusalem Bible

³⁰⁶NEB New English Bible

³⁰⁷De Wilde Wilde, A. de. *Das Buch Hiob eingeleitet, übersetzt und erläutert*. OTS 22. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1981.

³⁰⁸RSV Revised Standard Version

³⁰⁹NEB New English Bible

³¹⁰1QH *Hymn Scroll* from Qumran

³¹¹KB *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti libros*. Ed. L. Koehler and W. Baumgartner. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1953.

³¹²NJPS New Jewish Publication Society Version

³¹³Whybray Whybray, Norman. *Job*. Readings. Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1998.

³¹⁴Newsom Newsom, Carol A. “The Book of Job.” In *The New Interpreter’s Bible*. Ed. Leander E. Keck et al. Vol. 4. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996. 317–637.

hip³¹⁵h). The term has been used by Job in 31:37, where he said that if only he could encounter God face to face in a legal setting he would “give him an account (גַּד hip³¹⁶h) of [his] steps,” i.e., he would set out in detail the evidence of his life that would prove him an innocent man. It may be that the term אָמַן (or סוּמ) in v 6 should also be regarded as a legal term, meaning “submit”; but its use elsewhere is always in metaphorical contexts. The quotations of the opponent’s words (vv 3a, 4) are also instances of the use of legal language.

The *function* of the speech is to present Job’s response to the divine speeches (the first of Job’s replies, in 40:4–5, was only a holding operation). At the end of a lawsuit, the plaintiff would be expected to accept or reject the case offered by the defendant, and the expectation of readers is that such will be the function of this speech. Job’s position, however, appears to be ambivalent. On the one hand, he concludes with a statement that he is “submitting,” or withdrawing from the case (if the interpretation of the term אָמַן in v 6 set out below is correct). On the other hand, he does not concede that his opponent is in the right or that he is in the wrong. He does concede that he made his depositions “without understanding” and regarding matters “too wonderful” for him (v 3), and yet he says no more of the divine speeches than that he has “heard” them. This sounds rather like a non-acceptance of their argument.

In short, it seems that Job has come to the realization that his case is hopeless. Yahweh is determined not to answer questions about justice, whereas justice is the one thing that Job is interested in. Job will therefore withdraw his suit—not because he has lost his case but because, given the attitude of his opponent, he finally despairs totally of ever winning it—or even of having it heard.

The *tonality* of the speech is low-key and cool. The one term with a possible emotional content is אָמַן in v 6, which is understood here as “I melt, I submit,” and which gives a helpful clue as to Job’s tone of voice. His language is the language of concession, but there is a determination about his speech as well: it is Job who will define what Yahweh’s speeches have really been about (power!, v 2), which is not at all what Yahweh was trying to convey; and his concentration in vv 4 and 5 on the mere process of the disputation rather than upon any substantive issues is no doubt to be understood as his refusal to accept the responses of Yahweh. Job’s final word “I accept consolation” (נִחַמְתִּי, v 6) shows that we do not leave Job in despair or misery or self-abasement; he is determined to bring his period of mourning to an end and resume his life. So the tone is ultimately forward-looking, preparing for the positive air of the prose epilogue that will ensue.

The *nodal verse* of Job’s speech is inevitably the last (v 6), which faces two ways: in respect of the past, he has had no satisfaction, but he will draw a line beneath it; in respect of the future, he intends to live as a social being surrounded by his support group, no longer as an outcast on the ash heap.

Comment

2–6 In his reply to the first divine speech (40:3–5), brief though it was, Job has said that he stands by what he has previously argued, and he will not reiterate his case. This reply to the

³¹⁵hiph hiphil

³¹⁶hiph hiphil

second divine speech goes one step further, in saying that he is abandoning his suit against Yahweh (if that is indeed how v 6a is to be read); but, just as in 40:3–5, he does not withdraw a word he has said, he does not admit that God is in the right or that he is in the wrong, he does not confess to any sins or apologize for what he has said. This reading, it must be admitted, is not accepted by all; given that this final reply by Job is hugely important for the understanding of the book as a whole, it is truly tantalizing that it is so cryptic and ambiguous. Jung perceptively remarked: “Guileless as Job’s speech sounds, it could just as well be equivocal” (C. G. Jung, *Answer to Job* [trans.³¹⁷ R. F. C. Hull; London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1954] 31). It is not that Job’s speech is a “tongue-in-cheek” confession, as David Robertson suggested (“The Book of Job: A Literary Study,” *Soundings* 56 [1973] 446–69 [466]), for it is not insincere; but it is a crafty and subtle speech that means more than it says. For an analysis of the many interpretational possibilities, see B. Lynne Newell, “Job: Repentant or Rebellious?,” *WTJ*³¹⁸ 46 (1984) 298–316 (= *Sitting with Job: Selected Studies on the Book of Job* [ed.³¹⁹ Roy B. Zuck; Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992] 441–56); Ellen J. van Wolde, “Job 42,1–6: The Reversal of Job,” in *The Book of Job* (ed.³²⁰ W. A. M. Beuken; BET³²¹L 114; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1994) 223–50. I do not follow Newsom’s³²² attractive suggestion, nevertheless, that the ambiguity may be “strategic,” the poet involving readers even more than usual in the construction of the meaning, and deliberately creating more than one possibility for meaning (cf. also William Morrow, “Consolation, Rejection, and Repentance in Job 42:6,” *JB*³²³L 105 [1986] 211–25).

In this speech, Job has three remarks to make: (1) he acknowledges the omnipotence of Yahweh (v 2), (2) he accepts that he has intruded into the area of “marvels,” in which he has no competence (v 3b), (3) now that he has heard the utterances Yahweh has addressed personally to him (v 5), he abandons his suit against God (v 6a) together with his mourning and he intends to resume his normal life (v 6b) (if that is what that verse means). Remarks 2 and 3 are preceded by quotations he makes of the words of Yahweh, so that his remarks are presented as responses to particular utterances of Yahweh. Remark 1 is not so preceded, which may suggest that it is Job’s response to the divine speeches as a whole.

2 Job, we may presume, has a specific purpose in beginning his response to the divine speeches on this note. There is nothing novel about his point, which goes “no further than he had acknowledged all along” (Rowley³²⁴y). So why does he make it? It is no spontaneous “expression of unrestrained admiration” (Andersen³²⁵n). It is more deliberate than that. It can

³¹⁷trans transitive

³¹⁸*WTJ Westminster Theological Journal*

³¹⁹ed. edited by, edition

³²⁰ed. edited by, edition

³²¹BETL *Bibliotheca ephemeridum theologicarum lovaniensium*

³²²Newsom Newsom, Carol A. “The Book of Job.” In *The New Interpreter’s Bible*. Ed. Leander E. Keck et al. Vol. 4. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996. 317–637.

³²³*JBL Journal of Biblical Literature*

³²⁴Rowley Rowley, H. H. *Job*. NCB. Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1970.

³²⁵Andersen Andersen, F. I. *Job. An Introduction and Commentary*. TOTC. Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1976.

only be to signal how he has heard the speeches of Yahweh: he recognizes full well that whenever Yahweh has asked him whether he can do this or that, he has always been implying that Job can not but Yahweh can (that, we note, is not the only point of the divine speeches, and is certainly a minor element in the second speech). Job will not deny the force of that manifold truth. In that sense, he accepts the argument of the divine speeches: he is a mere mortal, unfitted by capacity or knowledge for the management of the universe; as he has said already, in comparison with Yahweh, he is of little account (40:4).

So there is a concessive note here: he will not resist the divine move to put him in his place and to underline his creatureliness.

And yet there is also perhaps a dimension to his words that remains resistant to that divine move: as Dhorme³²⁶ puts it, Job's words are "tantamount to a confession of the futility of discussions concerning divine intervention in human affairs." If demands for justice and a questioning of God's manner of governing the universe are only ever to be answered by an invocation of the divine almightiness, it is a sorry state of affairs, and every bit as bad as Job had been complaining all along (cf. 23:13–14). In short, Job's words are both a capitulation and, in a way, a reiteration of his complaint. And when Job says, "No purpose of yours can be thwarted," what purpose can he be thinking of if not Yahweh's designs against him? To be sure, Yahweh has illustrated in rich detail his cosmic purposes, but what bearing have those upon Job's case? What those divine designs in cosmology and meteorology and zoology have gone to show is that Yahweh's purposes always succeed, which means for the Job of the dialogues that he cannot ever be other than Yahweh's victim.

There is yet more to this response by Job. However we state the purpose of the divine speeches, there are few who would argue that they intend only to reassert the divine power. At the very least, they seem equally concerned to convey the divine wisdom, and, if the argument of this commentary is adopted, they go far beyond that in sketching Yahweh's program for the whole universe. His created order is not a rule-bound mechanism, sustained by principles of balance and equity and retribution and equivalence. Yahweh's universe is a vast array of differences held together by the divine intimacy with its manifoldness and the divine delight in the quiddity and the contrariness of its parts that are exemplified by Behemoth and Leviathan. This formal response by Job to the divine speeches ignores all that, and—as when Joseph says to his brothers, "It is as I said to you, You are spies" (Gen 42:14)—retorts in effect to Yahweh's subtle and engaging exposition of his vision for the cosmos, "I know, it is as I said, you are only interested in power." That ידעתי "I know" is very revealing: whether it means "I now know what I only guessed before, that you really are addicted to power" or "You don't need to tell me, I've known all along that you only ever follow your own desires, which are never thwarted" Job can hear nothing that is not addressed to his single issue of concern: the question of justice. From Yahweh's point of view, Job is being recalcitrant, but from Job's point of view, though he will have to submit and withdraw his case (v 6) he is not going to accept that he has received the shadow of an answer.

³²⁶Dhorme Dhorme, E. *A Commentary on the Book of Job*. Trans. H. Knight. London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1967 [original *Le livre de Job*. Paris: Gabalda, 1926].

The foregoing remarks are by no means the received wisdom about this verse. Straha³²⁷n, for example, thought that “This is no longer a recognition of God’s arbitrary omnipotence. It does not mean, ‘Thou canst do as Thou wilt, and never give an account of Thy doings,’ but rather, ‘Thou canst make the innocent suffer, yet ... Thou art just and good.” Fohre³²⁸r observes that the term “know” (יָדַע) signifies an experience that embraces the whole of existence, a knowledge that liberates and supports. What such commentators do not explain is how the speeches of Yahweh can have led Job to this conclusion. At another extreme, it has been argued (by Goo³²⁹d) that the sentence is almost infinitely ambiguous: it could be straightforwardly submissive, he says, or indignant, or sarcastic, or obsequious, or even falsely submissive. He is right that the tone is very difficult to determine, but the matter here must be settled by the meaning in the context, and especially the context of the immediate sequel to the divine speeches.

3 Job’s second remark consists of a quotation of Yahweh’s words followed by his own response to them; by the citation form, “Job is making quite explicit that he is responding formally to the challenge of Yahweh as his adversary” (Habe³³⁰l). The first colon repeats (with one omission) the words of 38:2, “Who is this who obscures the Design by words without knowledge?” Most translations make this into a quotation of Yahweh’s words, to which Job responds in the remainder of the verse, but some commentators think it is an editorial gloss (cf. Rowle³³¹y).

Job evidently has had ringing in his ears all through the divine speeches the charge with which the first of them began: “Who is this who obscures the Design by words without knowledge?” According to Yahweh, what Job has really been doing in all his quest for justice is to ignore the grand design Yahweh has for the universe. In 38:2 Yahweh had said that Job had been “darkening” (חָשַׁךְ) it, which Job quotes as “concealing” or “obscuring” (עָלַם) it—a minor change that seems to be without special significance.

Job’s own response is intriguing. He says that he spoke “marvels” (נִפְלְאוֹת), things “too wonderful for me” (נִפְלְאוֹת מִמֶּנִּי), which he did not “understand” (בִּין) and did not “know” (יָדַע). What in the Book of Job count as “wonders”? They have always been the inscrutable deeds of God in creation, which Eliphaz speaks of in 5:9, Job himself in 9:10, and Elihu in 37:5, 14—except for 10:16, where Job speaks ironically of the heroic deeds of God in battle against puny Job (see further, J. Conrad, *TDO*³³², 11:533–46; R. Albertz, *TLO*³³³, 2:981–86; outside Job,

³²⁷Strahan Strahan, J. *The Book of Job Interpreted*. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1913.

³²⁸Fohrer Fohrer, G. *Das Buch Hiob*. KAT 16. Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1963.

³²⁹Good Good, Edwin Marshall. *In Turns of Tempest: A Reading of Job, with a Translation*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990.

³³⁰Habel Habel, N. C. *The Book of Job*. OTL. London: SCM Press, 1985.

³³¹Rowley Rowley, H. H. *Job*. NCB. Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1970.

³³²*TDOT Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*. Ed. G. J. Botterweck, H. Ringgren, and H.-J. Fabry. Trans J. T. Willis, G. W. Bromiley, and D. E. Green. 15 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974–2006.

³³³*TLOT Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Ed. E. Jenni and C. Westermann. Trans. M. E. Biddle. 3 vols. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997 [translation of *THWAT*].

God's "wonders" tend to be acts of deliverance in history). So what "wonders" has Job been speaking of, which have been "too wonderful" for him, which he did not "understand" (בין) or "know" (ידע)? All Job has been speaking of are the principles on which the world is, or should be, governed; he thought they were pretty straightforward matters of justice and fairness, but the way Yahweh tells it, everything in the world is a marvel, and Job had better accept that justice and fairness too, like the structure of the physical universe, and the ways of Yahweh in rain and wind, are "marvels" beyond his comprehension or understanding. Redefining cosmic justice as a "marvel" puts it outside any realm that humans can access or have rights in. "A confession of ignorance is appropriate when man is faced by divine mysteries" (Dhorm³³⁴e), and Job has to confess that he knows nothing, understands nothing now that it is clear that justice is one of those "marvels" or divine mysteries.

Now this is a capitulation indeed. If cosmic justice is God's business, then it is whatever he decides it is. It is not a principle to which he himself is subject, to which he gives his allegiance. It is not a rule, the knowledge of which is shared by Yahweh and humans. It is yet another sphere of divine might, another instance of the truth that Yahweh can "do anything," as Job began this speech by acknowledging. And Job has come to know that such is in fact the truth about the universe through the divine speeches, which have—in his understanding—made Yahweh's power and Yahweh's knowledge the only issue, and have steadfastly suppressed Job's questions about justice. Calling Yahweh's manner of administering the universe a "marvel" is not to praise it (as Dale Patrick thought ["The Translation of Job xlii 6," *VT* 26 (1976) 369–71]), but Job's ultimate act of despair.

Job has no choice now but to accept that this is the way things are, but he cannot be at all happy about it—because he has now had his worst fears confirmed (John Briggs Curtis, "On Job's Response to Yahweh," *JB*³³⁶L 98 [1979] 497–511 [509], sees this point very clearly). All along he had suspected that, for God, might meant right, and he had wanted that suspicion to be corrected. Too late; Yahweh has assured him that the creator of the universe is indeed subject to no law or principle. Such is the Design, and Job's demands for justice have been adjudicated out of order as an obscuring of it.

Job is not going to press the matter further. He has been defeated in his case against God, but he has won a victory of sorts, as Gordi³³⁷s puts it: "God's admission that justice is not all-pervasive in the universe is a clear, if oblique, recognition of the truth of Job's position." As we saw on v 2 above, Job's words of capitulation are not the end of the matter for the observant reader.

We should note the term Job uses of his speaking without understanding. דגל hip³³⁸h is not the ordinary word for "speak" or "utter," but refers rather to informing or declaring; it is especially used of announcing things not previously known before (as in 1:15; 12:7; 36:9) or

³³⁴Dhorme Dhorme, E. *A Commentary on the Book of Job*. Trans. H. Knight. London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1967 [original *Le livre de Job*. Paris: Gabalda, 1926].

³³⁵*VT Vetus Testamentum*

³³⁶*JBL Journal of Biblical Literature*

³³⁷Gordis Gordis, R. *The Book of Job: Commentary, New Translation, and Special Notes*. New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1978.

³³⁸hiph hipil

things kept secret (as in 11:6; 38:18) (cf. BD³³⁹B, 616b §2), and is thus almost like “reveal.” One particular context is important for the present passage: 31:37, where in the very last verse of Job’s final speech (as it has been regarded in this Commentary; cf. on 31:35–37) Job says that if only he could encounter God face to face in a legal setting he would “give him an account (גַּדְּ hip³⁴⁰h) of [his] steps,” i.e., he would set out in detail the evidence of his life that would prove him an innocent man. In using the same term here, he makes clear that the legal suit is still the framework of his thinking; what is different now is that he has come to a realization that the whole of that legal realm, with his self-defenses and his accusations against Yahweh, were outside his scope. At the time, the lawsuit had seemed a reasonable step for a man to take who suffered an injustice; now it transpires that justice is not a value in its own right, but, if anything, a minor element in a huge divine plan consisting of “wonders” (נִפְלְאוֹת). Though he did not understand it at the time, his “depositions” (הַגְדָּתִי) concerned matters that belonged to the realm, not of the prosecution of justice, but of the “wondrous,” a realm to which he recognizes himself an outsider, who knows nothing (וְלֹא אָדָע “and I did not know”).

4 Job again quotes Yahweh. But only the words “I will question you, and you shall answer me” have been spoken by Yahweh (at the beginning of both his speeches, 38:3 and 40:7). The words “Listen, and I will speak” are not Yahweh’s, but Elihu’s, in 33:31. Has Job then confused Yahweh with his self-avowed spokesman Elihu? O³⁴¹r has the poet forgotten what Elihu said? O³⁴²r should we make nothing of this little discrepancy? Probably the last option is the best. Kissan³⁴³e’s solution, that these are Job’s words, falters because of the parallelism between the two cola of the verse.

Like v 3a, this verse is correctly presented by most modern translations as a quotation of the divine words, although some commentators think it is no more than a gloss, and NE³⁴⁴B omits it altogether.

5–6 As with the previous citation of Yahweh’s words, Job is formally following the routines of the dispute (*rib*) process. Verse 4, however, unlike v 3a, has not been a charge against himself that he must deal with here. It was a sentence in Yahweh’s mouth that dealt only with procedure and process: who will speak first, who will reply. It seems too trifling a matter to mention now, at the very climax of the interchanges between Job and Yahweh, does it not? And, more than that, it is all water under the bridge by now, is it not, now that the confrontation with Yahweh is drawing to a close? No, by no means; its function is to declare, in the coolest manner possible, that the process of the dispute has now come to a close. What it means is that Yahweh has spoken, Job is giving his reply, and that will be that. The debate, the lawsuit, has nowhere else to go. I hear you, says Job to Yahweh, as people say, I hear you, when they mean, I understand you perfectly, but I don’t agree.

³³⁹BDB Brown, F., S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs. *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1906.

³⁴⁰hiph hiphil

³⁴¹Or *Orientalia*

³⁴²Or *Orientalia*

³⁴³Kissane Kissane, E. J. *The Book of Job Translated from a Critically Revised Hebrew Text with Commentary*. Dublin: Browne & Nolan, 1939.

³⁴⁴NEB New English Bible

But what does Job's reply amount to? He does not for a moment negate the words he has spoken, but he withdraws or abandons his case (so too Habe³⁴⁵). Why so? Habe³⁴⁶ thinks that "Yahweh's appearance in person was sufficient vindication of Yahweh's integrity and clear evidence of his goodwill," but the Job we have come to know in the course of the dialogues cannot have drawn such a conclusion from the divine speeches. It would seem rather that Job has come to the realization that his case is hopeless: Yahweh is determined not to answer questions about justice. Job will withdraw his suit not because he has lost his case but because, given the attitude of his opponent, he finally despairs totally of ever winning it—and even of having it heard.

In these sentences lies the dénouement of the whole Book of Job. It is a climax that has rarely (in my opinion) been properly understood. It is not an upbeat, "comic," resolution, but it is not a tragedy either. Some may find it a deeply sad and cheerless outcome, but others may feel it rather a blessed release to recognize that there is no underlying principle of justice in the universe. However we may feel about the outcome of the book, in order to grasp the nature of that outcome there is much exegetical ground to cover.

5 It is usual to find a contrast between the two halves of this verse, between "hearing" and "seeing," between "hearing about" and "seeing (directly)," between "then" and "now," between (inferior) "hearing" and (superior) "seeing." But all this is more than doubtful. First, Job has not actually *seen* Yahweh (there is no language of visual perception), but only heard him speak, so "my eyes have seen you" can only be an idiom for a close or authentic encounter (and the view that seeing is a higher form of knowledge than hearing [de Wilde³⁴⁷; cf. also G. Gerald Harrop, " 'But now my eye seeth thee,' " *CJ*³⁴⁸ 12 (1966) 80–84] is without foundation, and probably a Western intellectualization of the privileging of that particular sense). Secondly, Job does not say that he had previously heard "about" Yahweh, as distinct from now seeing him directly; the Hebrew has "I heard you with the hearing of the ears." It would be strange if he were describing his imbibing of traditions about God or his listening to the friends' theological statements as "hearing Yahweh." All the sententious remarks of commentators about a contrast between mere hearsay in the past and immediate perception at the present moment are an irrelevance. Thirdly, though Job says that "now" (עתה) his eyes have seen Yahweh, it is now also, just now, that he has heard Yahweh—for the first time; so in effect the "now" refers both to the hearing and the seeing (similarly Goo³⁴⁹). Fourthly, seeing and hearing in the Hebrew Bible are usually parallel forms of perception and not contrasted with one another (cf., e.g., 13:1; 29:11; Gen 24:30; Exod 3:7; 2 Kgs 19:16; Prov 20:12; Cant 2:14; and Ps 48:8 [9] "as we have heard, so have we seen," where the hearing and the seeing are consonant); 1 Kgs 10:7, where what the Queen of Sheba sees with her own eyes surpasses the reports she has heard of Solomon's wisdom and wealth, is only an apparent exception, for the contrast is not between hearing and seeing but

³⁴⁵Habel Habel, N. C. *The Book of Job*. OTL. London: SCM Press, 1985.

³⁴⁶Habel Habel, N. C. *The Book of Job*. OTL. London: SCM Press, 1985.

³⁴⁷de Wilde Wilde, A. de. *Das Buch Hiob eingeleitet, übersetzt und erläutert*. OTS 22. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1981.

³⁴⁸*CJT Canadian Journal of Theology*

³⁴⁹Good Good, Edwin Marshall. *In Turns of Tempest: A Reading of Job, with a Translation*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990.

between hearing a report and “seeing” for oneself (a seeing that must include hearing, since she is more likely to be hearing than seeing Solomon’s *wisdom*).

An important consequence that flows from recognizing the two halves of the verse as essentially equivalent rather than contrastive is that only so does the connection of vv 5–6 with what precedes become clear. That is, in v 4 Job quotes Yahweh as undertaking to speak first himself and then give Job the opportunity of replying; then in v 5 Job acknowledges that Yahweh has indeed spoken and asked his questions, so now Job will give his reply (v 6). If on the other hand, we were to think that “I heard you with my ears” (v 5a) refers to the time before Yahweh’s speeches and “my eyes have now seen you” (v 5b) to what Yahweh has said in his speeches, it would be difficult to discern (1) how v 5a is relevant at this point (i.e., why should Job go back earlier than the matter of chap. 38?), and (2) why he should speak of his hearing of the divine speeches as “seeing” Yahweh? It is only if we take “hearing” and “seeing” together as two essentially similar forms of perception that “seeing” can be an appropriate term for taking in the intentions of Yahweh in his speeches (so too, to some extent, Newsom³⁵⁰, Goo³⁵¹d).

Even if the two halves of the verse were contrastive, it would still be important to consider what might be contrasted. It would have to be a distinction between distant and close experience of God, and though it may be portrayed as a contrast between ears and eyes, it is not really a contrast of verbal and visual communication. For, as it has been noted above, Job has not actually “seen” God (as, e.g., Driver-Gray³⁵² agree), and what he has just now been doing is “hearing” God’s speeches. It is common to make Job’s declaration “now my eyes see you” into the statement of a mystical experience of the divine (cf., e.g., Terrien³⁵³n), but it is unlikely that Job is referring to any experience apart from what he has just had—that is, of the words of Yahweh and their import.

Job had uttered the hope in 19:27 that he might see God while he still lived: “to behold Eloah while still in my flesh—that is my desire, to see him for myself, to see him with my own eyes, not as a stranger.” At that point it was very clear that for Job to see God would mean his vindication: he firmly believed that his “champion” or defending counsel would sooner or later “rise last to speak for me,” even if it had to be a post-mortem vindication, after Job’s skin had been “stripped” from him (19:26)—and then Yahweh would be compelled to acknowledge the right in Job’s plea. Now that it is true that Job has “seen” Yahweh, which is to say, he has witnessed him speaking, we might think that he has attained all his desire. But it has not turned out as Job expected: the new question is, When he “saw” God, was it his Vindicator that he saw? Or³⁵⁴ was the Yahweh of the speeches not the very same deity that Job had imagined in his worst nightmares as a cosmic bully who cannot be held to account (9:12–20)? Now that he has

³⁵⁰Newsom Newsom, Carol A. “The Book of Job.” In *The New Interpreter’s Bible*. Ed. Leander E. Keck et al. Vol. 4. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996. 317–637.

³⁵¹Good Good, Edwin Marshall. *In Turns of Tempest: A Reading of Job, with a Translation*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990.

³⁵²Driver-Gray Driver, S. R., and G. B. Gray. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Job together with a New Translation*. ICC. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1921.

³⁵³Terrien Terrien, S. L. “Job.” *IB*. New York and Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1954. 3:877–1198.

³⁵⁴Or *Orientalia*

seen Yahweh for himself, seen him with his own eyes, and heard him deny him the vindication he so craved, he can have no more hope. Sentence by sentence through the divine speeches his words in 14:19 have come true for him: “as water wears away stone and torrents scour the soil from the land—so you destroy a mortal’s hope.”

Job’s sentence here has been invested with great significance by some commentators. Peake³⁵⁵ found it “the supreme lesson of the book ... Happy, even in his pain, that he has found himself and his God, he would rather suffer, if God willed it, than be in health and prosperity. He knows that all is well, he and his sufferings have their place in God’s inscrutable design; why should he seek to understand it? In childlike reverence he acknowledges it to be far beyond him.” Strahan³⁵⁶ beautifully commented: “From the dark and narrow field of personal experience he is led into a vast cosmos which is luminous with God ... He is content to take his place in the great scheme of things.... He is at once satisfied and awed into silence ... [T]here is a singular blending of rapture and pain,—the rapture of the consciousness of God, the pain of self-knowledge.” More simply put, but in the same tradition, is Rowley³⁵⁷’s remark: “His intellectual problem is unsolved, for he has transcended it.” The distance of such readings from the wording of the text is an adequate marker of their loss of perspective.

In another idiom, many speak of the “immediate personal encounter” of Job with God that he has now experienced (e.g., Fohrer³⁵⁸), without recognizing that within the worldview of the book that is not so surprising an event as we today might count it. Job has often enough been expressing a desire for such a meeting (e.g., 23:3–4), but he never envisaged an existential encounter that would turn his world upside down and change all his values and priorities, and, as far as he is concerned, he has had no such encounter. He has wanted a meeting with God where his case for justice can be weighed; and now that he has heard from Yahweh a long and self-regarding speech that has never once mentioned justice for Job, he is not going to be impressed by attempts to bill it as a divine-human encounter that shakes the foundations of his universe.

6 This crucial verse, with the last words of Job (which did not end with 31:40, despite what is said there!), forms the climax of the whole dispute between Job and Yahweh. But sadly it contains three major uncertainties: (1) the meaning of אָמַס (is it “I reject, despise” with perhaps “myself” or “my words” as the implied object, or “I melt, submit”?), (2) the meaning of נִחַמְתִּי (is it “I repent” or “I am consoled, I accept consolation”?), and (3) the meaning of “dust and ashes” (is it a reference to the place and the situation of Job on the ash-heap, or a reference to Job’s status as a mourner, or to his human mortality?). For the details, see also the *Notes*.

In a nutshell, the view that will be argued here is that (1) in a legal sense, Job “submits,” i.e., he withdraws his lawsuit against Yahweh, (2) since he has done no wrong, he cannot “repent,” but having been in mourning, he now brings the period of mourning to an end by “accepting

³⁵⁵Peake Peake, A. S. *Job, Introduction, Revised Version with Notes, and Index*. CB. Edinburgh: T. C. & E. C. Jack, 1905.

³⁵⁶Strahan Strahan, J. *The Book of Job Interpreted*. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1913.

³⁵⁷Rowley Rowley, H. H. *Job*. NCB. Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1970.

³⁵⁸Fohrer Fohrer, G. *Das Buch Hiob*. KAT 16. Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1963.

consolation,” for his lost children as well as for the loss of his honor, a consolation that is being offered to him both from the friends and (in his own way) from Yahweh, and (3) the consolation he accepts is “for” the “dust and ashes” that have been the visible expression of his state of mourning.

(1) The verb **סָנַן** at first sight appears to be the common verb for “despise, reject”; the difficulty with that understanding is that the verb has no object here. Perhaps, lacking an object, think some, it means “feel loathing, contempt, revulsion,” as in a few other cases (Ps 89:38 [39]; Job 34:33; 36:5). But even these cases are questionable: in Ps 89:38 (39), the object is probably explicit in the term “your anointed,” though that is not grammatically the object of the verb (it would be the object also of **נָסַר** “reject,” which almost always has an object but oddly lacks one here); Job 34:33 (*q.v.*³⁵⁹), which is very difficult, may have an explicit object in the subject or the object of the previous verb, and in any case can hardly mean “feel loathing”; and 36:5 is very problematic text-critically. Even more to the point, it would seem strange to have Job express a self-loathing for having raised his issue of justice. Where could such an attitude have arisen from? The divine speeches have ignored Job’s complaint, but they have not suggested that it is in any way disgusting.

So is an object to the verb **סָנַן** implied? Judging by the possible parallels mentioned above, it does not seem likely; and in terms of the resulting sense there are difficulties also. Many have therefore proposed that an object should be restored to the text by emendation. The suggestions for filling such a gap have usually been “myself” or “my words.” The problems with so doing are these: (1) we have seen no reason for Job to “despise himself,” which would be much more emotional language than he has otherwise used in this rather low-key speech, and it would be hard to see what it would mean for him to “reject himself.” And (2) there is no reason either why he should “despise” his words, while the clause “I reject my words” does not seem at all natural. Perhaps a better solution would be to suppose that the missing word is “my case,” and that what Job is rejecting or retracting (though hardly “despising”) is his claim against Yahweh that he has been unjustly treated.

But there is something rather too speculative about identifying an implied object for the verb or creating an object by emendation. There is another route that may be better: to seek another interpretation of the verb. A meaningful alternative is available in the verb **סָמַן** II “flow, melt,” a homonym of **סָנַן** I “despise, reject,” which occurs also at 7:16; Ps 58:7 (8). That sense might not at first sight seem very suitable here, but if we understand it as a metaphor for “yield” (as *REB*) or “submit” (as in the *Translation* above), it creates an excellent meaning at this point. For what we expect to hear from Job before he has finished speaking is an explicit capitulation and acknowledgment of the defeat of his lawsuit—especially if it is correct that a Hebrew lawsuit was conceived to be still underway so long as one of the parties had not acknowledged that there was nothing more to be said in defense of their position. If this is so, then with this one word Job announces the end of his legal claim for justice, while in the rest of the verse he expresses where he now stands in personal and social terms.

There is one other plausible approach to the problem of the first verb: it is to accept a tiny emendation of the verb form itself, from **סָנַנְךָ** “I melt” from the verb **סָמַן** II “flow, melt,” to **סָמַנְךָ**, with exactly the same meaning, from the verb **סָמַן** “flow, melt” (which is in fact a byform

³⁵⁹*q.v. quod vide*, which see

of օֹחַ); see further, *Note b*. The advantage of this proposal is that it brings two further texts into the discussion where the verb is used of humans, Isa 10:18, where օֹחַ օֹחַ is “the melting of a sick person,” which apparently means “the collapse of a person in convulsions” (³⁶⁰NE “as when a man falls in a fit”), and even more to the point, 2 Sam 17:10, where a valiant man melts (օֹחַ) with fear. It is not with fear that Job is melting, but the example shows that it is not a very strange metaphor to speak of a person “melting” and that various English translations need to be sought to accommodate the senses of the Hebrew word.

(2) As for the second problematic word of this verse, the verb נִחַם has two different senses: in the niphal, as here, it can mean (a) “regret, be sorry, repent, relent,” or (b) “comfort oneself, be comforted, be consoled.”

(a) The sense “repent” has been the traditional translation (so ³⁶¹KJ, ³⁶²RS, ³⁶³NA, ³⁶⁴J, ³⁶⁵NI, ³⁶⁶NE). The problem is that נִחַם nip³⁶⁷h in this sense, when used absolutely (i.e., without a following phrase indicating what is being repented of), is almost always in reference to Yahweh’s “repenting,” i.e., changing his mind, about planned evil: Exod 13:17; 1 Sam 15:29; Jer 4:28; 20:16; Ezek 24:14; Jonah 3:9; Joel 2:14; Zech 8:14; Pss 106:45; 110:4. The translation “repent” in such contexts is in fact inappropriate, and it would be better to understand the verb as meaning “retract a declared action,” as H. Van Dyke Parunak puts it (“A Semantic Survey of *NH̄M*,” *Br³⁶⁸b* 56 [1975] 512–32). Only in Jer 31:19 is נִחַם used of human repentance in the usual sense (“after I had turned away, I repented”). So it is not very likely that Job means that he “repents” or feels sorry for anything (so too Andersen³⁶⁹); and it is unthinkable that he should say that he “repents” for his dust and ashes (whether that means his state of mourning or his existence as a mortal human being; but see *Note c*).

In addition to the evidence of the precise meaning of the term is the very important consideration that Job is no sinner; in his world it would not be regarded as a “sin”—a sin for which one would need to repent—to have spoken “without understanding,” and there is no other wrongdoing of which Job would be able to repent.

(b) The sense “be comforted, be consoled” is preferable in the context. It is well attested, at Gen 24:67; 2 Sam 13:39; Ezek 14:22; 31:16; 32:31; Eccles 38:17, 23; 1Q³⁷⁰H 4:17; 17:13; 4QBar³⁷¹k^{372a} 1.1.1. Of special interest are Gen 38:12, where it refers to a point in time after the

³⁶⁰NEB New English Bible

³⁶¹KJV King James Version, Authorized Version

³⁶²RSV Revised Standard Version

³⁶³NAB New American Bible

³⁶⁴JB Jerusalem Bible

³⁶⁵NIV New International Version

³⁶⁶NEB New English Bible

³⁶⁷niph niphal

³⁶⁸*Bib Biblica*

³⁶⁹Andersen Andersen, F. I. *Job. An Introduction and Commentary*. TOTC. Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1976.

³⁷⁰1QH *Hymn Scroll* from Qumran

³⁷¹4QBark *Barkhi Nafshi^a* (4Q434)

^{372a}*Barkhi Nafshi^a* (4Q434)

death of Judah's wife when he "is consoled," i.e., has completed his period of mourning, and Jer 31:15, where Rachel "refuses to be comforted," i.e., to accept the consolation a mourner would usually receive (the same language in Ps 77:2 [3]). To the same effect, Jacob "refuses to be comforted," and says that he will go down to Sheol to his son (Joseph), mourning (Gen 37:35). Others who are comforted, or allow themselves to be comforted, are Isaac, after his mother's death (Gen 24:67), Judah, after the death of his wife (Gen 38:12), David, after his son Amnon's death (2 Sam 13:39), and Jerusalem, after its ruin (Ezek 14:22) (in Ezek 32:31, Pharaoh comforts *himself* for his lost army). This is the sense in which the verb (נחם) and the related noun (נחמה) have been used elsewhere in Job (2:11; 6:10; 7:13; 15:11; 16:2; 21:2, 34; 29:25; 42:11). For such an understanding, see also Ina Willi-Plein, "Hiobs Wiederruf?—Eine Untersuchung der Wurzel נחם und ihrer erzähltechnischen Funktion im Hiobbuch," in *Essays on the Bible and the Ancient World: Isaac Leo Seeligmann Volume* (ed³⁷³. Alexander Rofé and Yair Zakovitch; Jerusalem: E. Rubinstein, 1983) 3:273–89 (= her *Sprache als Schlüssel: Gesammelte Aufsätze zum Alten Testament* [ed³⁷⁴. Michael Pietsch and Tilman Präckel; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2002] 130–45); Daniel J. O'Connor, "The Comforting of Job," *IT*³⁷⁵Q 53 (1987) 245–57; Thomas Krüger, "Did Job Repent?," in *Das Buch Hiob und seine Interpretationen: Beiträge zum Hiob-Symposium auf dem Monte Verità vom 14.–19. August 2005* (ed³⁷⁶. Thomas Krüger, Manfred Oeming, Konrad Schmid, and Christoph Uehlinger; ATAN³⁷⁷T 88; Zurich: Theologische Verlag Zürich, 2007) 217–29.

What these passages make clear is that to be comforted is not a matter of being on the receiving end of comfort from others, but a decision one makes for oneself, that one will accept comfort and thus cease the period of mourning and resume a normal life. So too P. A. H. de Boer, "Does Job Retract? Job xlii 6," in his *Selected Studies in Old Testament Exegesis* (ed³⁷⁸. C. van Duin; OT³⁷⁹S 27; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991) 179–95 (192): "[T]o consider the period of mourning as closed is not the same as being compensated for it or denying the loss one has suffered: it means to live on, to turn a new page in the book of one's life." H. Simian Yofre has described it as a moment of "dissociation" from previous action or feelings (*TDO*³⁸⁰T, 9:342), while Gary Anderson has stressed the behavioral aspect of being comforted, i.e., the change of behavior consequent upon returning to normal life (*A Time to Mourn, a Time to Dance: The Expression of Grief and Joy in Israelite Religion* [University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991] 9–14). See also, especially on the role of consolation as a combating of

³⁷³ed. edited by, edition

³⁷⁴ed. edited by, edition

³⁷⁵*ITQ Irish Theological Quarterly*

³⁷⁶ed. edited by, edition

³⁷⁷ATANT Abhandlungen zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments

³⁷⁸ed. edited by, edition

³⁷⁹OTS *Oudtestamentische studiën*

³⁸⁰*TDOT Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*. Ed. G. J. Botterweck, H. Ringgren, and H.-J. Fabry. Trans J. T. Willis, G. W. Bromiley, and D. E. Green. 15 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974–2006.

grief through rational argument, Carol A. Newsom³⁸¹, “‘The Consolations of God’: Assessing Job’s Friends across a Cultural Abyss,” in *Reading from Right to Left: Essays on the Hebrew Bible in Honour of David J. A. Clines* (ed.³⁸² J. Cheryl Exum and H. G. M. Williamson; JSOTSu³⁸³ p 373; London: Continuum, 2003). And see also Xuan Huong Thi Pham, *Mourning in the Ancient Near East and the Hebrew Bible* (JSOTSu³⁸⁴ p 302; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999).

(3) How now are we to understand the final phrase of the sentence, “upon dust and ashes”? For a defense of the traditional translation of the term אפר as “ashes,” as against the claim of some that it is another word for “dust, earth,” see the *Note*. The key question is how the “upon” (על) is to be understood in the present context.

It is often thought that “upon dust and ashes” refers to Job’s present situation, that is, presumably, on the refuse-heap outside the town where he has been sitting “among the ashes” since the news of his children’s deaths has been brought to him (2:8). The problem with this view is that the normal ritual of mourning seems to have involved sitting “upon” ashes but not sitting “upon” dust (which is where one would usually sit, and so is unlikely to be a ritual): in mourning the dust is usually sprinkled upon one’s head (2:12; Josh 7:6; 1 Sam 4:12; 2 Sam 1:2; Ezek 27:30; Neh 9:1), while one is sitting upon ashes (2:8; Isa 58:5; Jonah 3:6) or rolling in ashes (Jer 6:26; Ezek 27:30) or lying in ashes (Esth 4:3) or sitting in sackcloth and ashes (Luke 10:13; cf. Matt 11:21). For some rarer exceptions to this practice, see *Note* e. Other references to the use of ashes in mourning ritual are Isa 61:3; Dan 9:3.

In that case, it is unlikely that Job is literally “upon” both dust and ashes, the dust being rather what is sprinkled on his head. So we should understand על not as “upon” in a spatial sense, but as “on account of” or “for,” denoting the matter or the reason for which he is accepting consolation. The idiom is the same in 2 Sam 13:39, where David is comforted “in the matter of” (על) Amnon, and Isa 22:4, where the mourner is being comforted “for” (על) the destruction of the city (similarly 1 Chr 19:2 [|| 2 Sam 10:2 על]; Jer 16:7; 31:15; Ezek 14:22; 32:31; and some Qumran references mentioned in *Note* e)—as well as in v 11, where Job is comforted “over, in respect of” (על) all the evil that Yahweh had brought on him. Here Job says that he now accepts consolation for the dust and ashes (i.e., the mourning and the bereavement that was its cause) that he has been enduring.

This line of Job’s, as thus construed, contains one of the biggest surprises of the book. We have not been prepared by the course the book has taken to witness Job abandoning his case against God. His arguments have been so cogent, his passion so sincere, that it is almost unthinkable that at the end of the day he should merely withdraw from the lawsuit. But he does; and we need to understand why he does. He has not been convinced by the divine speeches either that he is in the wrong or that Yahweh’s cosmic concerns truly outweigh his own call for justice. On the contrary, he has made it plain that he has heard the divine speeches as nothing more than a reaffirmation of divine power (v 2)—which means inevitably a marginalization of the issues of justice he cares about so passionately. And he has not admitted

³⁸¹Newsom Carol A. “The Book of Job.” In *The New Interpreter’s Bible*. Ed. Leander E. Keck et al. Vol. 4. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996. 317–637.

³⁸²ed. edited by, edition

³⁸³JSOTSu *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, Supplement Series

³⁸⁴JSOTSu *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, Supplement Series

to any fault—apart from not recognizing that in the divine counsels justice is subsumed into supranatural “wonders,” which means that the discussion of cosmic justice is ultimately off limits to humans. Job will accept that he is not permitted to question the divine decision—he has no choice—but his complaints are still not answered, and he knows it. Now he knows what he had always feared, that he would never get justice; now he can no longer hope that his champion will in the end rise to speak on his behalf (19:25), for the judge before whom his champion would prosecute Job’s claim has now dismissed the claim out of hand. And now the desire to “behold Eloah while still in my flesh” (19:26), a desire so intense that it has been consuming his inmost being (19:27), has proved the ultimate disappointment of his existence: it was no beatific vision of the deity that Job wished for, but a face-to-face confrontation that would lead to his exculpation. What has happened now is the worst of outcomes, worse even than being judged guilty—it is Eloah’s definitive decision that Job’s case amounts to nothing, given the cosmic scope of the grand Design.

With one word, Job announces his withdrawal from his lawsuit: אָמַס “I submit.” And then, in words that have nothing to do with the processes of law or his grievance against the deity, and as if he had never raised the issue of justice, he declares that he will bring to an end his period of mourning and return to his usual life—as if it could ever be normal again: “I accept consolation for my dust and ashes.” We readers may have somewhat lost sight of his dead children in the course of the great drama of his struggle with God, but that word נַחֲמָתִי “I accept consolation” is all the reminder we need that, in all his rage against heaven, he has also been a man in mourning. Now, in that word “I submit,” he has bidden farewell to theology, and, like *Candide*, will retire to cultivate his garden. He will not again say a single word, by the evidence of the Epilogue, he will conduct no more theological disputations with his friends or summon God again to defend himself; he will devote himself to his family and his farm.

But what he leaves unsaid is as important as what he says. What he does not say is that he is accepting consolation for his loss of standing and dignity, and for the traducing of his character, for he has had no consolation on that score. He is not “content” (Whybra³⁸⁵y), he is not convinced, he is not now possessed of a totally new outlook on the world. He has submitted to the famous omnipotence of Yahweh (as in v 2), that is all. His eyes have been opened by his encounter with God, to be sure, but what he has seen has not been his vindication but his ultimate humiliation.

Finally, we may note the case for which William Morrow (followed by Newso³⁸⁶m) has argued (“Consolation, Rejection, and Repentance in Job 42:6,” *JB*³⁸⁷L 105 [1986] 211–25 [223, 225]), that the verse may well be deliberately vague: “the writer has constructed the verse in such a way as to make it ring with several nuances ... Job 42:6 is a polysemous construction, which even its original readers would have heard differently, depending on their evaluation of the meaning of Yahweh’s address to Job ... [T]he poet himself intended no explicit resolution to the tension that exists in the Yahweh speech(es) between the very fact of Yahweh’s presence and the actual contents of the divine address.” Attractive though this suggestion is, my own

³⁸⁵Whybray Whybray, Norman. *Job. Readings*. Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1998.

³⁸⁶Newsom Newsom, Carol A. “The Book of Job.” In *The New Interpreter’s Bible*. Ed. Leander E. Keck et al. Vol. 4. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996. 317–637.

³⁸⁷*JBL Journal of Biblical Literature*

inclination is, without insisting that the text has only one specific sense or that I have correctly identified it, to order the interpretive suggestions that have been made according to their plausibility in my judgment, and to prefer one proposal over the others.

Explanation

If we had thought that the speeches of Yahweh would be the climax of the book, and that they would provide the solution to the problems of Job, we were mistaken. For the meaning of the Book of Job cannot be inferred without a full appreciation of the response of Job, the hero of the book, to those speeches, and an understanding of the nuances of this last short speech of his in reply.

As we have seen, there are three elements in Job's speech. In the first, Job acknowledges the omnipotence of Yahweh (v 2); in the second, he accepts that he has intruded into an area in which he has no competence (v 3); and, in the third, having heard Yahweh's speeches, he abandons his case against God and determines to resume his normal life (vv 4–6). Put like that, Job's intentions seem rather straightforward. But there is a subtlety in each of these responses.

First, when Job acknowledges Yahweh's omnipotence, there is nothing new in that, for he has always done so, and there is none of his companions who would deny it. But this avowal of Yahweh's omnipotence stands here as a response to Yahweh's speeches, which have by no means had that as their central theme. If this is Job's response, it means that he has failed to understand much of the divine speeches, whose purpose seems rather to have laid out the principles behind Yahweh's creation and maintenance of the world. Though Yahweh never mentioned justice, Job has not failed to notice its absence. Job declines to accept any worldview that does not prioritize justice, and so he effectively says, It is as I always said, Might is right with you!

Second, when he says he spoke of "marvels," matters beyond his comprehension, he gives the appearance of a humble acknowledgment of the wonders of the divine working. But throughout his many speeches, Job was never speaking of "marvels," only of the justice that he, and the world of humans, is denied, but that he believed is knowable and accessible even if not presently enjoyed. If now Yahweh designates such matters "marvels," that is, beyond human understanding, Job has no choice but to accede; he has made, in Yahweh's eyes, a category mistake. But not in his own, for his words were not some casual misspeakings, but his solemn and considered "depositions" (דגג hip³⁸⁸h; see *Comment* on v 3). A lawsuit had seemed to him a reasonable step to embark on when he had suffered an injustice; now it turns out that justice is not a value in its own right, but merely a minor element in a huge divine plan consisting of "wonders"—a realm in which he recognizes himself an outsider, who knows nothing. So while he accepts he has spoken out of order according to the divine judgment, he has not accepted this reclassification of justice, which still remains unsatisfied.

Third, when he says he has "heard" and "seen" Yahweh, it is a stunning rejection of the divine speeches. There is not a word of how Job feels about the speeches of Yahweh, of the effect they have had on him, of how he might yet respond to them. Without insubordination or hostility, Job's last word coolly turns its back on the substance of Yahweh's speeches, and merely

³⁸⁸hiph hipphil

focuses on the process of the lawsuit. Yahweh, he says, has spoken, Job has given his reply, and that is all there is to it; the case is over. Job will not continue his lawsuit any longer. And that is not because he has been satisfied, and certainly not because he has lost the case, but because he now realizes definitively that there is no hope of having it heard. No hope, then, of the vindication he has always craved, of seeing his champion rise last to speak in court on his behalf and of Yahweh conceding defeat by falling silent (19:25–27). Line by line, the divine speeches have, as water wears away stone and torrents scour the soil from the land, destroyed Job's hope (14:19).

There is one more sentence, spoken more to himself than to Yahweh, perhaps. This too faces two ways. As for his lawsuit with Yahweh, he “melts” or “submits” to the state of affairs that has left the case without a resolution. As for the future, the words “I accept consolation” show that we do not leave Job in despair or misery or self-abasement; he is determined to bring his period of mourning to an end and resume his life.

Job is neither triumphant nor defeated. The divine speeches have in the end neither satisfied nor humiliated him. It is almost as if Yahweh had not spoken from the tempest, for Job has chosen not to hear in the divine speeches the sunny side of the world's structure and management, and he has learned nothing except to have his worst fears confirmed, that he will not get justice from God. No doubt he is better off knowing where he stands and having nothing left to hope for.

The book is not over yet. The Epilogue will demand that we revise yet again our assessment of the meaning of the book as a whole.³⁸⁹

³⁸⁹ David J. A. Clines, [*Job 38–42*](#), vol. 18B, Word Biblical Commentary (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2011), 1205–1225.