

A New Attempt to Interpret Job 30:24

Abstract: Job 30:24 is a notorious *crux interpretum*. Understandings of this verse which are typically offered cannot be anchored in the text and appear to be too simplistic for the Jobian context. If it is recognized that a scribal confusion might have occurred because of the possible ligature $\text{נ} \text{ה} = \text{ה} \text{נ}$ a cogent text can be obtained, which can be paraphrased: “God would not destroy completely (cause the death of) a person, if that person sees in such calamity his deliverance.” This deep insight serves as the logical foundation for the concluding “protestation of innocence” in Chapter 30. Job, who has been ruined and who sees in death his salvation, must be considered a man of fortitude, integrity, and honesty and his words unquestionably believable and acceptable. His drive for restitution, according to the Doctrine of Retribution, should be heard.

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Introduction

Job’s final speech (Chapters 29 and 30) has been perceived as consisting of two parts: the good past (Chapter 29) and the bad present (Chapter 30). In this division, v. 30:24 describes Job’s miserable current state and his treatment by God. The verse reads:

*Surely He would not struck at a ruin
If, in a calamity, one cried out to Him.*

אֵךְ לֹא־בָעִי יִשְׁלַח־יָד
אִם־בְּפִידוֹ לְהִנְ שׁוֹעַ

This incomprehensible NJPS translation aptly conveys the thematic ambiguity and textual incoherence that typifies the exegesis on v. 24 since the time of ancient versions.

The verse challenged generations of exegetes. Beer characterizes v. 24 as a notorious *crux interpretum*.¹ Driver and Gray simply say that MT is “obviously corrupt.”² More recently, Pope notes that “this verse has been regarded as one of the most difficult in the entire poem.”³ Gordis agrees with these observations, saying “that this verse, one of the most difficult in the book, has sustained damage is beyond question.”⁴ He allows himself to reconstruct the verse and translate it as “Yet I always believed, ‘Surely, if a man pleads, must one extend one’s hand, when he cries out under the affliction to God.’” Habel observes that “the text of this verse is so obscure that some editors do not attempt a translation. The emendations are legions.”⁵ Even Clines, a relatively late commentator, admits that “this is one of the most unintelligible in the book. Literally it appears to read “Surely one does not stretch out a hand to a ruin, or in his calamity a cry for help to these things [לְהִנְ as a neuter]?”⁶ Obviously, this literal translation is gibberish.

¹ Georg Beer, *Der Text des Buches Hiob* (Marburg: Elwert, 1897), 197.

² Samuel R. Driver and George B. Gray, *A Critical Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Job*, Vol. 2 (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1921), 219.

³ Marvin H. Pope, *Job* (AB 15; 1st ed. 1965; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1986), 223.

⁴ Robert Gordis, *The Book of Job: Commentary, New Translation, and Special Notes* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1978), 336.

⁵ Norman C. Habel, *The Book of Job: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985), 416.

⁶ David J. A. Clines, *Job 21–37* (WBC 18A; Dallas: Word Books, 2006), 957.

The difficulties of v. 24 often led exegetes to interpretations that cannot be easily anchored in the MT and do not fit the context.⁷ Reider observes,

not only are some of the vocables and their syntax beyond comprehension, but the entire purport of the verse seems to be contradictory to the argument of the passage. The burden of the argument is the all-embracing power of God who governs at will and does to human beings what He pleases, but the verse in question seems to set a limit to the willful power of God, declaring that it does not extend to the weak.⁸

Grabbe felt that part of the problem is the word **בְּעִי**. He notes: “Though it is usually translated ‘ruin,’ that imagery is felt by many commentators to be inappropriate here.”⁹ Good thought that “the line begins promisingly, but **לָהֶן**, ‘to them’ (feminine plural), has no referent, and the meaning of the noun **שׁוּעַ** is unknown.”¹⁰ He felt that at the end of v. 24b something is missing. It is obvious that both cola have unintelligible elements that make the verse enigmatic. In v. 24a the difficulties rest in the meaning of **בְּעִי** and the referent of the phrase **יִשְׁלַח יָד**, and in v. 24b a verb seems to be missing and **לָהֶן שׁוּעַ** is perhaps corrupt. The challenges of v. 24 led naturally to a host of emendations, many of them orthographically distant or untenable in the Hebrew language. Merx even deletes the entire verse.¹¹

The purpose of this study is to exploit the possibility that the potential ligature **הַנּוּ = וְהַנּוּ** might have been the cause of MT corruption. It will be shown that admitting this possibility results in the cogent text “But, not at a ruin would he send his hand, if in his death [is] for him deliverance” (**אֲךָ לֹא-בְעִי יִשְׁלַח יָד אִם-בְּפִירוֹ לּוֹ תְּשׁוּעָה**), which can be paraphrased “God would not destroy completely (cause the death of) a person, if that person sees in such calamity his deliverance.” This understanding of v. 24 fits the context well.

Analysis

Ancient Versions

The Septuagint seems to understand v. 24 as suggesting that Job wishes he could do away with himself or someone would do this for him. It renders v. 24: “Oh then that I might lay hands upon myself, or at least ask another, and he should do this for me” (Εἰ γὰρ ὄφελον δυναίμην ἑμαυτὸν χειρώσασθαι, ἢ δεηθεὶς γε ἑτέρου, καὶ ποιήσει μοι τοῦτο). In this paraphrastic translation, the Septuagint reads apparently **לָא** “Oh That” (Εἰ γὰρ) instead of MT **לֹא**; **בִּי** “upon myself” (ἑμαυτὸν) instead of MT **בְּעִי**;¹² **אִשְׁלַח יָד** “I lay hands” (χειρώσασθαι) instead of MT **יִשְׁלַח יָד**; and, **לִי כֵן יַעֲשֶׂה** “he should do this for me” (ἢ δεηθεὶς) instead of MT **לָהֶן שׁוּעַ**. Every word in the MT was read differently.

⁷ For instance, Schlottmann translates v. 24: “Nur, Trümmer tastet man doch nicht an! oder ist Jenes Sturz des Andern Heil?” and paraphrases it: “Ist denn dadurch, daß man des Unglücklichen Schmerzen durch liebloses Auftreten vermehrt, etwa eigener Vortheil zu erlangen?” (Konstantin Schlottmann, *Das Buch Hiob* [Berlin: Weigand and Grieben, 1851], 398 and 400).

⁸ Joseph Reider, “Etymological Studies in Biblical Hebrew,” *VT* 2 (1952): 113–30, 127–28.

⁹ Lester L. Grabbe, *Comparative Philology and the Text of Job: A Study in Methodology* (SBLDS 34; Missoula: Scholars Press, 1975), 101.

¹⁰ Edwin M. Good, *In Turns of Tempest; A Reading of Job with a translation* (Stanford: Stanford University, 1990), 130. He renders v. 24: “Surely he does not put out his hand to a ruin, if in its extinction ...”

¹¹ Adalbert Merx, *Das Gedicht von Hiob* (Jena: Mauke, 1871), 163.

¹² Solomon Mandelkern, *Veteris Testamenti Concordantiae Hebraicae atque Chaldaicae* (Leipzig: Viet, 1894), 842a. Mandelkern thinks that Septuagint rendered **בְּעִי** by **בְּעִי**.

Targum Jonathan is less paraphrastic than the Septuagint, and understands v. 24 as expressing the request that God should not treat Job in anger but keep his gates open for his sincere plea. It translates: “only not in rage let him send his plagues but in times of pains let him receive their prayers” (לְחֹדֶר לֹא בִרְתַחָא יִשְׁדֵּר מִחַתִּיָּה אִין בְּעֵדֵן צַעְרִיָּה יִקְבַּל צְלוֹתְהוֹן). Targum (Jonathan) takes **בְּעִי** = “in rage” (בִּרְתַחָא), though this sense is not attested in the Tanach or later Hebrew; seems to be reading **אִידו** “his plagues” (מִחַתִּיָּה) instead of MT **אִם־בְּפִידוֹ** = “but in times of pains” (אִין בְּעֵדֵן צַעְרִיָּה); and, **לְהֵן שׁוּעַ** = “let him receive their prayers” (יִקְבַּל צְלוֹתְהוֹן), which has no basis in the MT. A different version of this Targum has for v. 24 “therefore, let not his plague strike to his bones, but let him set them a plaster for his sores” (בְּרַם לֹא לְגִרְמִיָּה יִגְרַם מִחַתִּיָּה אִין בְּחַטִּיָּי יִשׁוּי לְהֵן אֶסְפְּלֵעִיתָא). This version understands **בְּעִי יִשְׁלַח־יָד** as “strike to his bones” (לְגִרְמִיָּה יִגְרַם); seems to be reading **אִידו** “his plagues” (מִחַתִּיָּה) instead of MT **אִם־בְּפִידוֹ** = “but for his sore” (אִין בְּחַטִּיָּי), probably taking **פִּידוֹ** = **פִּידְעוֹ** = **פִּצְעוֹ** = “his wound”; and, **לְהֵן שׁוּעַ** = “let him set them a plaster” (יִשׁוּי לְהֵן אֶסְפְּלֵעִיתָא).

The Peshitta considers v. 24 an expression of hope that God would be merciful with Job. It translates: “But let him not stretch out his hand against me, and when I cry to him let him save me” (בְּרַם לֹא עֲלֵי נוֹשֵׁט אִידָהּ וּמָא דְנַעֲיַת לֹתָהּ נַפְרַקְנִי). The Peshitta seems to read **בִּי** “against me” (עֲלֵי) instead of MT **בְּעִי**; **יָדוֹ** “his hand” (אִידָהּ) instead of MT **אִם־בְּפִידוֹ** = “and when I cry” (נַפְרַקְנִי); **לְהֵן** = “to him” (לֹתָהּ) instead of MT **לְהֵן**; and, **שׁוּעַ** = “let him save me” (נַפְרַקְנִי).

Finally, the Vulgate takes v. 24 as a statement of exception *vis-à-vis* v. 23. It renders v. 24 “Only you did not send your hand to their consumption, and if they fall, you yourself will save (them)” (*verumtamen non ad consumptionem eorum emittis manum tuam et si conruerint ipse salvabis*). The Vulgate takes **בְּעִי** = “to their consumption” (*ad consumptionem eorum*); reads **תִּשְׁלַח** “you will send” (*emittis manum tuam*) instead of MT **יִשְׁלַח**, probably for harmonization sake; understands **אִם־בְּפִידוֹ** = “and if they fall” (*et si conruerint*); and **לְהֵן שׁוּעַ** = “you yourself will save” (*ipse salvabis*).

The ancient versions appear hopelessly confused and offer no help whatever to the exegete. They seem to have tried valiantly to wrest some sense from the words in v. 24 by resorting to unattested *ad hoc* meanings, but obviously failed. Grabbe says: “Considering the diverse and generally paraphrastic rendering of the versions, they appear to have had the same difficulties modern commentators find.”¹³

Classical Jewish Exegesis

Rashi (1040–1105) considers v. 24 an expression of hope for some comfort, which Job finds in his state of disaster. This hope is based on the observation that a judge is usually lenient with a person who has suffered a misfortune. So God, too, when he sends a calamity on his beings, he also delights them (מִשְׁעֵשְׁעֵן) with some consolation.¹⁴ It seems that Rashi derives the meaning of **שׁוּעַ** from the root **שַׁעַע**. Rashbam (c. 1085–1174) turns his grandfather’s interpretation into a complaint. He accepts the general observation regarding God’s behavior with his beings, but claims that this is not the case with Job; indeed, Job considers God as unusually cruel

¹³ Grabbe, *Comparative*, 103.

¹⁴ This perspective seems to be relying on the Midrashic saying: “The Lord does not strike a nation and let her sit in despair, but brings misfortune on one and consoles it with another” (פְּסִיקְתָא דְּרַב כְּהֵנָא, Naḥamu 126b [Lyck: Solomon Buber, 1868]). Cf. Marcus Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* (Brooklyn: Traditional Press, 1903), 1159b.

to him (v. 21). Rashbam derives the meaning of שוע from the noun תשועה “salvation.”¹⁵ Qara (eleventh-twelfth centuries) capitalizes on the word עי considering it to have the meaning “assembly, or collection” (קבוץ) as עי שדה (Mic 1:6) is the heap of rocks that is cleared from a field. He understands עי as referring to a “heap of disasters” sent at almost the same time. Job had this experience and it devastated him. Now he begs God not to subject him to this kind of experience again, but rather to single punishments (as the single pickings of chicken).¹⁶ If God would assent to this request, then Job would consider these punishments as consolations (שעשועים) as therapy (כרפואה וארוכה).¹⁷

Ibn Ezra (1089–c. 1164) renders עי by “sepulcher, grave.” In his view, the verse says: “No one would stretch out a hand to rescue him when in grave, and in time of distress generosity is of no utility.” Ibn Ezra assumes in v. 24b an implied נפשות (“souls”) to which להן refers and takes שוע = נדיבות (“generosity”). Nachmanides (1194–1270) also assumes that עי means “grave.” He explains that Job says that when he would be buried God would not stretch out a hand to help him and resurrect him. This calamity would also affect others (נפשו) interred, and they would complain (שוע) to him. Nachmanides attempt at concretization makes Ibn Ezra’s explanation more obscure. David Qimchi (1160–1235) presents a novel thought. Job avers that when in grave, he would be out of God’s reach. Thus death, which is considered by men as a calamity, is to some salvation and advantage (שוע ומעלה ותועלת) because all travails of life cease in death. Gersonides (1288–1344) only notes that בעי = “prayer” (from בעה) or “devastation” (from עי), and שוע = “a cry” or “generosity.”

It is obvious that classical Jewish exegesis was challenged by the difficulties of v. 24 and could not come up with meaningful rational solutions. Reider rightly observes that “the medieval commentators, likewise [as the ancient versions], grope in the dark and are unable to extract a satisfactory meaning from this problematic verse.”¹⁸ This situation, as we shall see in the following section, is not much different than the one prevailing in modern exegesis to this day.

Modern Exegesis

Modern exegesis interprets v. 24 in an assertive sense, as presenting two rhetorical questions, and as being connected to v. 25. Earlier modern analysis has preferred *in esse*, according to Driver and Gray, the following two interpretations of v. 24:

- (1) Howbeit in a ruin not one stretch out a hand (to save himself)? Or in his calamity (will there not be) therefore a cry for help? (2) Surely, against a ruin (figuratively for Job, who describes his shattered frame as a heap of ruins) one (or he, i.e. God) will not stretch out a (hostile) hand; Or do they (his hands) gain riches (שוע, as 36:19) in its calamity (the calamity of the ruin, virtually פידו = the calamity of another man)?¹⁹

¹⁵ Sara Japhet, *The Commentary of Rabbi Samuel Ben Meir (Rashbam) on the Book of Job* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2000), 415.

¹⁶ The word פיד has in the Talmud the meaning “picking of chicken.” One finds in b. Abodah Zarah 4a “I will collect from them (punish them) as the chicken picks (in small instalments).” Cf. Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 1159b.

¹⁷ Moshe M. Ahrend, *Rabbi Joseph Kara’s Commentary on Job* (Jerusalem: Mossad HaRav Kook, 1988), 89.

¹⁸ Reider, “Etymological,” 128.

¹⁹ Driver and Gray, *Commentary* 2, 219. They adopt the first translation. Cf. Samuel R. Driver and George B. Gray, *A Critical Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Job*, Vol. 1 (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1921), 259.

Recent exegesis considers v. 24 an expression of an obvious social norm. It is socially improper to kick a person when he is down.²⁰ When such person cries out for help human decency requires that he should be helped.²¹ A typically modern translation of v. 24 is that of Clines: “Surely I never stretched out my hand against any needy person, if they cried out in their calamity.”²² He takes the various components of the verse to mean as follows.

אֲשֶׁר = “surely” (Gen 26:9, 1 Sam 16:6, and Job 19:13) is a shortened form of אֲשֶׁר־כֵּן. The translation of אֲשֶׁר by “howbeit” implies that v. 24 introduces a contrast to the preceding verse. Beer reads אִם “if” instead of MT אֲשֶׁר.²³ However, there is little support for a אִם/כֵּן confusion. Hengstenberg renders אֲשֶׁר = “except, only not.”²⁴ Ewald translates אֲשֶׁר by “at least,” which is an extension of “only.”²⁵ Delitzsch takes אֲשֶׁר = “but.”²⁶ Terrien has for אֲשֶׁר “whenever,” which is unattested in the Tanach.²⁷ Pope and Habel omit אֲשֶׁר.²⁸

לֹא = “never.” This translation adds the word “ever,” since “never” = “not + ever” and לֹא = “not.” Gordis follows the Septuagint in reading לֹא “if.”²⁹ The *Ketib-Qere* apparatus attests to the לֹא/לֹא־לִי confusion (2 Sam 18:12, 19:7). The לֹא/לֹא־לִי confusion is attested, for instance, in Jud 21:22, 1 Sam 13:13, 20:4, and Job 9:33. However, while לֹא־אֲשֶׁר occurs several times in the Tanach the phrase אֲשֶׁר לֹא never occurs. Terrien omits לֹא.³⁰

בְּעַי = “against any needy person.” If the word is derived from the Hebrew root בעה “inquire, cause to swell or boil up” (Isa 21:12, 30:13, 64:1, Ob 6), as מרי from מרה and פרי from פרה, then it has nothing to do with being needy. Both Arabic بَعَى and Aramaic בעא could mean “seek” and thus “plead.” It is difficult to see how בְּעַי could be associated with the poor. Ehrlich says: “In בעי ist Beth stammhaft. Das Wort ist Substantiv und heisst Bitte; vgl. die daraus kontrahierte Partikel בי.”³¹ However, Hengstenberg already noted that “Allein ein Nomen בעי Gebet, Bitte kommt weiter gar nicht vor, während dagegen Trümmer עי gesichert ist.”³² Hitzig ob-

²⁰ Tremper Longman III, *Job* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 351. Longman considers v. 24 a rhetorical question: “Should he not send his hand on behalf of a ruin, when he cries out for help during a disaster?” This interpretation seems to take אֲשֶׁר = אִם, understands בעי = “on behalf of a ruin,” and assumes that the idiom יד שלח יד does not have a hostile sense. However, lexicographers do not mention the possibility that the preposition בְּ could mean “on behalf of.”

²¹ Cf. Samuel Terrien, *Job: Poet of Existence* (Indianapolis: Bobbs Merrill, 1957), 179; Gordis, *Job*, 328; Francis I. Andersen, *Job, an Introduction and Commentary* (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1976), 237; Gerald H. Wilson, *Job* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2007), 332; Longman (*Job*, 351); etc.

²² Clines, *Job 21–37*, 931.

²³ Beer, *Hiob*, 197. The אִם/כֵּן confusion is very rare. The *Ketib-Qere* apparatus provides only one case of a אִם/כֵּן confusion; 1 Kgs 1:47 אֱלֹהֵיךָ (K) but אֱלֹהִים (Q). Such confusion might have occurred in 2 Chr 22:6, where כִּי should be מִן as in 2 Kgs 8:29. In Nah 2:6 instead of the MT יכשלוּ Smith reads ימושלוּ, justifying the emendation as a אִם/כֵּן confusion (J. M. P. Smith, “Commentary on the Book of Nahum,” in J. M. P. Smith, W. H. Ward, J. A. Bewer, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Micah, Zephaniah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Obadiah and Joel* [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1985], 330).

²⁴ Ernst Wm. Hengstenberg, *Das Buch Hiob erläutert* (Berlin: Schlawis, 1870), 214. He says: “אֲשֶׁר vertritt nicht selten die Stelle einer Versicherungspartikel.”

²⁵ Georg H. A. Ewald, *Commentary on the Book of Job* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1882), 281.

²⁶ Friedrich Delitzsch, *Das Buch Hiob, neu übersetzt und kurz erklärt* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1902), 79. So also does August Dillmann, *Hiob* (Leipzig: Hirzel, 1891), 262. Cf. 16:7.

²⁷ Terrien, *Job*, 179.

²⁸ Pope, *Job*, 218; Habel, *Job*, 414.

²⁹ Gordis, *Job*, 336.

³⁰ Terrien, *Job*, 179.

³¹ Arnold B. Ehrlich, *Randglossen zur Hebräischen Bibel, Textkritisches, Sprachliches und Sachliches, Band VI, Psalmen, Sprüche, Hiob* (Hildesheim: Olm, 1968), 300.

³² Hengstenberg, *Hiob*, 215.

served that “ein Wort **בְּעִי** *Bitte* existiert im Semitischen überhaupt nicht.”³³ Mandelkern notes that in **בְּעִי** the word **עִי** is likely prefixed by the **ב** of utility.³⁴ However, if the substantive **בְּעִי** is assumed then one has also to accept that a prefixed **ב** was dropped by haplography.

Guillaume compares **עִי** with Arabic **عَمِي** “weak, helpless.”³⁵ This comparison would allow the meaning “at any poor” for **בְּעִי**. However, Grabbe says:

The major question, though, is whether the Ar root **עמי** is unique to that language or has cognates in other branches of Semitic. My research did not turn up any clear cognates unless the Ar word is itself a cognate of Heb **עִי** “ruin.” If so, the sense “weak, helpless” seems a special semantic development in Ar and of little use in our inquiry.³⁶

In Grabbe’s view, “The suggestion of Guillaume was interesting, but must be considered unlikely until further cognate evidence can be found.”³⁷ He feels that from biblical usage alone, one might derive the meaning “destruction” for **עִי**, and **ב** could be taken as showing accomplishment. The Rabbinic comment on Job 30:24 in b. Avodah Zarah reinforces this interpretation.³⁸ Indeed, the inner-verse parallelism between **בְּעִי** and **בפִּירוֹ** constitutes significant support for this view.

Driver and Gray observe that “**לְהִין שׁוֹעַ** for **לֹא יִשְׁנֶעַ**, and **בְּעִי** for **טַבָּעַ**, suggested tentatively by Dillmann, yield a satisfactory sense and have been generally accepted (e.g. by Bickell, Budde, Duhm).”³⁹ It should be noted, however, that a missing **ט** is not attested by the *Ketib-Qere* apparatus. Moreover, as Kissane observed: “The change required is considerable, and is doubtful if the sense obtained suits the context. Such a thought might have been suitable in vi. 11–12, where Job is apologizing for the violence of his language.”⁴⁰

Pope emends MT **בְּעִי** and reads instead **בְּעִי** “against the needy.” He says: “Job is, indeed, a wreck, but a heap crying for help is a bizarre metaphor.”⁴¹ Dhorme explains this emendation by noting that “v. 25 alludes to the compassion which Job practiced towards the needy, the latter being rendered by **אֲבִיוֹן**. The parallel word to **אֲבִיוֹן** is usually **עֲנִי** (cf. 24:4, 14).”⁴² The *Ketib-Qere* apparatus attests to the possibility of a missing or extra **נ**.⁴³

³³ Ferdinand Hitzig, *Das Buch Hiob übersetzt und erklärt* (Leipzig: Winter, 1874), 225.

³⁴ Mandelkern, *Concordantiae*, 226b.

³⁵ Alfred Guillaume, *Studies in the Book of Job* (Supplement II to the Annual of the Leeds University Oriental Society; Leiden: Brill, 1968), 115.

³⁶ Grabbe, *Comparative*, 102.

³⁷ Grabbe, *Comparative*, 103. However, the meaning “needy” for **בְּעִי** continues to be popular. See, for instance, Pope (*Job*, 222); Habel (*Job*, 416); August H. Konkel, *Job* (Carol Stream: Tyndale, 2006), 178; etc.

³⁸ Grabbe, *Comparative*, 102. According to b. Avodah Zarah v. 24 shows God will not destroy Israel in his punishment but will only punish like the pecking of the chicken.

³⁹ Driver and Gray, *Commentary* 2, 219. This interpretation has also been adopted by Georg Fohrer, *Das Buch Hiob* (KAT 16; Gütersloh: Mohn, 1963), 414.

⁴⁰ Edward J. Kissane, *The Book of Job* (Dublin: Browne & Nolan, 1939), 193.

⁴¹ Pope, *Job*, 222. So render also Beer (*Hiob*, 197); Kissane (*Job*, 193); Habel (*Job*, 416); Konkel (*Job*, 178); etc.

⁴² Eduard Dhorme, *A Commentary of the Book of Job* (London: Nelson, 1967), 445.

⁴³ One finds, for instance, Jud 4:11 **בְּצַעֲנִים** (K) but **בְּצַעֲנִים** (Q); Job 19:2 **וְהִרְכָּאֲנִי** for **וְהִרְכָּאֲנִי**; Prov 3:15 **מִפְּנֵי** (K) but **מִפְּנֵי** (Q); Prov 15:14 **וּפִי** (K) but **וּפִי** (Q); 2 Sam 21:6 **יִתֵּן** (K) but **יִתֵּן** (Q); 1 Kgs 17:14 **תֵּתֶן** (K) but **תֵּתֶן** (Q); and, Jer 42:6 **אֲנִי** (K) but **אֲנִי** (Q). Also, we have in Prov 8:17 **יִמְצָאֲנִי** instead of **יִמְצָאֲנִי** and in Ruth 3:4 **תַּעֲשֵׂי** instead of **תַּעֲשֵׂי**.

Early modern exegesis, following classical Jewish exegesis (Ibn Ezra, Qimchi), understood עַי as a euphemism for “grave” (*Todten-Hügel*).⁴⁴ Schlottmann considers “grave” (*Grab*) “freilich nicht hinlänglich begründeten Bedeutung.”⁴⁵ Hahn argued that the parallelism between בעַי and בפּיֶדוֹ means that “demnach kann das בְּ nur Präposition seyn, und עַי muss abgeleitet werden von עָוָה verkehren, zerstören, umstürzen.”⁴⁶ He takes עַי to mean “collapse, bad fall” (*Sturz*). Thus, עַי would reflect Job’s destroyed life, and this destruction would parallel the calamity in v. 24b. However, in the Tanach I עוּה means “bend, twist” (and so in Arabic عَوَى) but not “zerstören, umstürzen.” Gordis revocalizes MT בְּעַי to read according to the Aramaic בְּעַי “pleads.”⁴⁷ Godfrey Driver read בְּעַי “beggar.”⁴⁸ Reider, relying on Arabic cognates of עַי rendered it “weak.”⁴⁹ Delitzsch translated בְּעַי by “Zusammenbruch.”⁵⁰ Ewald took בְּעַי to mean “in the overthrow.”⁵¹ Terrien has for “heap of ruins.”⁵² Fohrer thought that “der Zusammenhang des Textes widerrät diese Versuche, den Konsonantenbestand von MT beizubehalten.”⁵³

יִשְׁלַח יָד = “I stretched out my hand (against).” This translation assumes that the text was יִשְׁלַח יָד, as the Septuagint has it, and that it has a hostile sense.⁵⁴ It is possible to perceive this version being a scribal error. The *Ketib-Qere* apparatus attests only to three cases of א/י confusion in 1 Sam 22:18 and 22; all being רויג (*K*) and רואנ (*Q*). One also finds, for instance, in 2 Kgs 8:15 לִי instead of לָא, and אש for יש in 2 Sam 14:19 and Mic 6:10, perhaps to soften the expression. Thus, the א/י confusion is rather rare. Moreover, as Beer noted שְׁלַח יָד does not mean “stretch out a hand.” This meaning is properly expressed by פִּרַשׁ יָד or נִשָּׂא יָד.⁵⁵

The phrase יִשְׁלַח יָד has been assumed referring to God, Job, poor, or any man. Ehrlich assumes that the referent is Death, mentioned in the preceding verse.⁵⁶ Gordis considers the phrase יִשְׁלַח יָד to be an idiomatic expression, having the non-hostile meaning “to extend help”

⁴⁴ For instance, Hufnagel renders v. 24: “Doch bis zum Todten-Hügel verfolgt sein Arm nicht, Wenn er den Unglücklichen, droht er ihm Untergang—rettet!” He capitalizes on the fact that five de Rossi MSS read להם instead of MT להן to assume that the original לְהֵם was derived from הוּם. Relying on the Arabic هَام “wander, rove” (*umherirren*), Hufnagel somehow obtains for MT להן the meaning “droht er ihm Untergang” (Wilhelm F. Hufnagel, *Hiob* [Erlangen: Palmisch, 1781], 215. Note also that BDB (223a) has for הוּם or הים “murmur, roar, discomfit (Arabic هَام is *rush about madly*)” (F. Brown, S. Driver, and C. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (1st ed. 1906; reprint; Peabody: Hendrickson, 2001), 223a.

⁴⁵ Schlottmann, *Hiob*, 398.

⁴⁶ Heinrich A. Hahn, *Commentar ueber das Buch Hiob* (Berlin: Wohlgemuth, 1850), 243.

⁴⁷ Gordis, *Job*, 336. This meaning for בעַי has been adopted also by Gersonides (Mikraot Gedolot, *ad loc.*); Heymann Arnheim, *Das Buch Job übersetzt und vollständig commentirt* (Glogau: Prausnitz, 1836), 180; A. Z. Rabinovitz, and A. Abronin, אִיּוֹב (Jaffa: Shushni, 1916), 73; Amos Hakham, סֵפֶר אִיּוֹב (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 1981), 231; etc.

⁴⁸ Godfrey R. Driver, “Problems in Job,” *AJSL* 52 (1936): 160–70, 164. He renders v. 24: “Surely no beggar would put out his hand, if he had found no relief in his plight.”

⁴⁹ Reider, “Etymological,” 127.

⁵⁰ Delitzsch, *Hiob*, 79. Similarly, Dillmann (*Hiob*, 262) has “collapse” (*Einsturz*).

⁵¹ Ewald, *Commentary*, 281.

⁵² Terrien, *Job*, 179. So also renders Good (*Job*, 131).

⁵³ Fohrer, *Hiob*, 414.

⁵⁴ This emendation has been adopted also by Beer (*Hiob*, 197); Kissane (*Job*, 193), Dhorme (*Job*, 445), Habel (*Job*, 416), etc.

⁵⁵ Beer, *Hiob*, 197. Hirzel avers that “שְׁלַח יָד = פִּרַשׁ יָד Klag. 1, 17 (vgl. Spr. 31, 20), oder נִשָּׂא יָד Hab 3, 10: die Hand ausstrecken nach Hülfe” (Ludwig Hirzel, *Hiob* [Leipzig: Weidmann, 1885], 181). However, the quoted stand-alone phrases are not necessarily equivalents of יִשְׁלַח יָד nor do they mean “die Hand ausstrecken nach Hülfe.”

⁵⁶ Ehrlich, *Randglossen*, 300.

(Ps 144:7).⁵⁷ In Hahn's opinion: "An ein Ausstrecken der Hände nach Hilfe, vgl. Hab. 3, 10. Thren. 1, 7 ist dem Zusammenhange nach nicht zu denken."⁵⁸ Pope takes the idiom **ב יד שלח** as having its regular hostile sense "send the hand against"; i.e., Job accuses God of assaulting him while he is helpless and imploring help.⁵⁹ Habel considers v. 24 linked thematically to v. 25 and renders **יד שלח** by "strike."⁶⁰

אם-בפידו = "if in their calamity."⁶¹ This translation is equivalent to reading **בפידם** instead of MT **בפידו**. Arnheim notes that such *pars pro toto* understanding "ist unserm Job eigen. Vgl. 13, 27. 28; 14, 3."⁶² The word **פיד** occurs only four times in the Tanach, most of them in the Book of Job.

Regarding **פיד**, Umbreit says: "Da ... das Stammw. im Arab. **سأى** *sterben* bedeutet, scheint es passend, das Wort hier in seiner Grundbedeutung von *mors* zu nehmen."⁶³ Delitzsch reads **בפיד** = "in ruin" (*im Verderben*).⁶⁴ Hakham notes that **פיד** is kindred to **איד** (Prov 24:22) and designates a disaster (31:29, 12:5).⁶⁵ Ehrlich arbitrarily understands **אם-בפידו** as meaning "wenn einem mit dem letzten Stoss."⁶⁶ The suffix in **פידו** could refer to God or the afflicted.

לָהֶן = "they." This interpretation seemingly reads **הֶן** (feminine) instead of MT **לָהֶן**.⁶⁷ Hakham suggests that **להן** refers to death (**מָוֶת**) and the netherworld (**בית מועד**) of the preceding verse.⁶⁸ However, both **מָוֶת** and **בית** are masculine nouns. Hahn says on **להן**: "Vielmehr ist es einfach die 3. Pers. Fem. Pl. die neutr. gebraucht ist: darüber, dass es nämlich so ist, vgl. Ruth. 1, 13."⁶⁹

להן "to them (feminine)" does not seem to have a suitable meaning or referent in the context. Hengstenberg arbitrarily suggested an implied **נפשות**, to which **להן** refers.⁷⁰ Dillmann says that "[**לָהֶן**] wofür **לָהֶם** in einige MSS. blosse Correctur ist, hier wie **לָהֶן** (Ruth 1,13. Dan. 2,6)

⁵⁷ Gordis, *Job*, 336. However, the use of **שלח** in a hostile sense, in the preceding verse (Ps 144:6), indicates that it should be also understood in a hostile sense in Ps 144:7. Indeed, it is likely that **שלח יריך** of Ps 144:7 belongs to Ps 144:6. It seems that the idiom **יד שלח** is always used in the Tanach in a hostile sense. Clines (*Job 21–37*, 957) rightly says that "Gordis's claimed support from Ps 144:7 for the sense 'extend help' is illusory." Arnheim (*Hiob*, 189) finds support for his non-hostile interpretation of **יד שלח** in Ps 18:16 and 138:7. He associates this phrase with **תשיבני** in the preceding verse: "die Hand reichen, um mich zurückzuführen in den Tod." Hengstenberg (*Hiob*, 214) says that **יד שלח** has "hier *sensu bono*, um ihm zu helfen."

⁵⁸ Hahn, *Hiob*, 243–44.

⁵⁹ Pope, *Job*, 223.

⁶⁰ Habel, *Job*, 414.

⁶¹ 1 Kennicott and 2(3) de Rossi MSS have **בפידו**. The plural "their" is adopted also by Arnheim, (*Hiob*, 180); Konkel (*Job*, 178); etc.

⁶² Arnheim, *Hiob*, 180.

⁶³ Friedrich W. C. Umbreit, *Das Buch Hiob* (Heidelberg: Mohr, 1824), 296.

⁶⁴ Delitzsch, *Hiob*, 79.

⁶⁵ Hakham, **איוב**, 231.

⁶⁶ Ehrlich, *Randglossen*, 300. Ehrlich renders v. 24: "Aber er—der Todt—legt nicht Hand an auf Verlangen, wenn einem mit dem letzten Stoss geholfen wäre." This interpretation makes no sense.

⁶⁷ Schlottmann, *Hiob*, 398. Schlottmann observes: "**להן** nehmen viele Ausleger für **להם** (was einige Manuscr. offenbar nur durch erleichternde Conjectur lesen); aber es kann wohl das Masc. des Pronom. als die allgemeinere Form für das Femininum stehen, nicht aber umgekehrt."

⁶⁸ Hakham, **איוב**, 231. Cf. also Schlottmann (*Hiob*, 398); Arnheim (*Hiob*, 180); A. Z. Rabinovitz, and A. Abronin, **איוב** (Jaffa: Shushni, 1916), 73.

⁶⁹ Hahn, *Hiob*, 244. However, Hahn's translation of **שוע להן** by "darüber schreien" seems to be assuming that **לכן** = **להן**.

⁷⁰ Hengstenberg, *Hiob*, 214. He reads v. 24b: "wenn bei seinem Verderben ihnen [i.e. the souls] Schreien ist."

= *deswegen, darum*.”⁷¹ The *Ketib-Qere* apparatus attests to a כ/ה confusion only in two cases (Jer 21:12 מעלליהם [K] but מעלליכם [Q] and Jer 49:30 עליהם [K] but עליכם [Q]).⁷² Hirzel also reads לָהֵן but assumes that the original was the dative הָהֵן, an Akkadian form of the Pronoun demonstrative, which corresponds to the Hebrew הָהוּא.⁷³ Hitzig says: “להֵן also nach bekannter Enallage des Numerus (37, 12. Am. 9, 11. Jes. 49, 15.) auf יד um so mehr, da auch בְּרַיִם ב (Ps. 55, 21.) gesagt wird.”⁷⁴ Dhorme reads לי “to me” instead of the MT להֵן.⁷⁵ Kissane emends להֵן to לְדַיִן “for redress.”⁷⁶ However, the *Ketib-Qere* apparatus does not attest to a ה/ר confusion. Terrien seems to have deleted להֵן.⁷⁷ Obviously, the word להֵן in v. 24 is difficult and did not find a reasonable interpretation.

שׁוֹעַ = “cried out.” This translation is a valiant effort to supply a verb for the second colon by revocalizing MT שׁוֹעַ as the *Piel* שָׁנַע.⁷⁸ Lexica usually identify שׁוֹעַ as a masculine noun.⁷⁹ Hakham raised the possibility that the word שׁוֹעַ is the infinitive absolute instead of an explicit verb, meaning “he cries out.”⁸⁰ Such understanding would be incompatible with the feminine plural of לָהֵן. Schlottmann has for שׁוֹעַ “salvation” (*Heil*).⁸¹ Hitzig takes שׁוֹעַ to mean proverbially “gain, advantage” (*Gewinn*).⁸² Terrien renders שׁוֹעַ by “begged.”⁸³

לָהֵן שׁוֹעַ = “they cried out.” Delitzsch hypothesizes that “בְּפִירוֹ לָהֵן שׁוֹעַ 30, 24 ist Unsinn, man erwartet etwa: בְּפִירֵי לֹא נִשְׁנַע; die falsche Schreibung der Negation לֹא als לָה (ebenso Dt. 3, 11; vgl. den umgekehrten Fall 38, 11 פֹּה פֹּא statt פֹּה) hat die Verwirrung veranlasst.”⁸⁴ Fohrer says: “Es ist לֹא יִשְׁנַע (לָה) (Dillmann u. a.) statt des unübersetzbaren Schreibfehlers zu lesen.”⁸⁵ Beer thought that it would be more correct to read לֹא נִשְׁנַע.⁸⁶ The א/ה confusion is attested in the *Ketib-Qere* apparatus in two cases (Jer 50:29 לֹא [K] and לָה [Q], Ez 14:4 בָּה [K] and בָּא

⁷¹ Dillmann, *Hiob*, 262. So also render, Ewald (*Commentary*, 281), etc.

⁷² Emanuel Tov, *The Textual Criticism of the Bible: an Introduction* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1989), 30, Table 5. Tov notes that in Jer 14:14 some MSS have לָהֵם instead of לָכֶם. It seems that this confusion occurs also in Ruth 1:14 (where we have לָהֵן for לָכֶן) and Dan 2:6 (where we have וְהֵן for וְכֵן).

⁷³ Hirzel, *Hiob*, 181.

⁷⁴ Hitzig, *Hiob*, 226.

⁷⁵ Dhorme, *Job*, 446. Dhorme explains: “Since the *nun* of להֵן comes from עֲנִי, we are left simply with לָה. In the light of G, it seems indeed that the original text had לִי. The ה of לָה springs from a combination of two *yods*; the one at the end of לִי and the other at the beginning of יִשְׁנַע (which later became שׁוֹעַ).”

⁷⁶ Kissane, *Job*, 194.

⁷⁷ Terrien, *Job* 179.

⁷⁸ Clines, *Job 21–37*, 957. Clines adopts the emendation of MT לָהֵן שׁוֹעַ to לִי יִשְׁנַע.

⁷⁹ H. W. F. Gesenius, *Gesenius' Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 811a; BDB (1002b); etc.

⁸⁰ Hakham, אִיּוֹב, 231.

⁸¹ Schlottmann, *Hiob*, 400.

⁸² Hitzig, *Hiob*, 225. Hitzig renders v. 24: “Nur an die Ruine woll’ er nicht Hand anlegen, oder hätte sie an deren Verderben Gewinn?” This translation does not result in a meaningful sentence.

⁸³ Terrien, *Job* 179.

⁸⁴ Delitzsch, *Hiob*, 1902), 133. This emendation leaves the presence of the וּ in בְּפִירוֹ unexplained; though Delitzsch cavalierly observes: “Lehrreich ist, dass ein ursprünglich geschriebenes פִּירֵי ohne Weiteres als פִּירוֹ gedeutet und dementsprechend als פִּירוֹ überliefert werden konnte.”

⁸⁵ Fohrer, *Hiob*, 414.

⁸⁶ Beer, *Hiob*, 197. וְאִם occurs in 2 Kennicott and 1 De Rossi MSS. The reading לֹא נִשְׁנַע is supported by Peshitta’s נִפְרִקְנִי and Vulgate’s *salvabis*. Beer translates v. 24: “Habe ich nicht hilfreiche Hand angelegt an den Elenden und wurde er nicht in seinem Unglück [von mir] gerettet.” He finds this translation contextually fitting.

[Q]), but it is obvious that it is rather frequent in the Tanach.⁸⁷ The ן/י confusion does not occur in the *Ketib-Qere* apparatus. Gordis reconstructs MT שוע פירו להן to read ישוע פיר אלה .⁸⁸ This reconstruction assumes a ן/א confusion (unattested in the *Ketib-Qere* apparatus, except in the ל/א confusion), a ן/י confusion (unattested in the *Ketib-Qere* apparatus, though in Prov 22:3 ויסתר [K] but ונסתר [Q]).⁸⁹ It is doubtful that a divine name would be so mangled.

Singular Interpretations

Among the earlier exegetes, Gaab felt that to understand v. 24 one has to take: (1) the ב in בעי as a prefix and עי = “grave” (*Todtenhügel*); (2) פיר , which otherwise means “calamity,” as having the meaning “death,” relying on the Arabic فاد (“wenigstens ist so viel als مات”); (3) the ל in להן as a prefix and הן = “weak,” relying on the Arabic وهن (*debilis fuit*); and, (4) שוע = ישועה . He obtains for v. 24 the proverbial saying: “But at the grave he would not send a hand, the weak is helped when he dies.”⁹⁰

Gaab, after noting that Alfred Schultens offers an analysis of 18 different interpretations of v. 24, chose: “Nur ungerechterweise sollt’ er mich nicht plagen, wenn im Unglück anders Schwache Hilfe fordern dürfen.”⁹¹ In this translation it is being assumed that בעי stands for בבעי , and relying on the Arabic بغى is “injustice” (*injustitia, vis iniqua*), while פיר has its standard meaning. More modern exegesis rejected both interpretations, which assume unattested meanings for the problematic words and lead to a sense for v. 24 that is contextually unacceptable.

Noyes understood v. 24 as expressing the futility of any plea when God is set on destruction. He renders: “When He stretches out his hand, prayer avails nothing; When He brings destruction, vain is the cry for help.”⁹² Noyes takes in v. 24a אך = “when” (unattested in the Tanach); לא = “nothing” (unattested in the Tanach); בעי = “prayer” (unattested in the Tanach); and, adds “avails.” In v. 24b he takes אם = “when,” but that could be the case only if אם is followed by a perfect [cf. BDB, 50a (4)]; להן = “vain” (reading להבל ?); and, adds “He brings,” “is the,” and “for help.” This paraphrastic interpretation, which cannot be anchored in Biblical Hebrew, has not been adopted by anyone else.

An interesting interpretation of v. 24 has been suggested by Reider. He assumes that the verse is a later gloss by a pious reader, who wanted to refute Job’s argument and defend God’s acts. Reider translates: “Surely He does not put forth His hand against the weak; is there advantage to Him in his calamity?”⁹³ He obtains this sense for the verse by making the following assumptions: (1) the difficult עי is a cognate of the Arabic عَى meaning “unable, impotent” espe-

⁸⁷ Compare 2 Kgs 25:29 שנא and Jer 52:33 שנה . See, for instance, in Lam 4:1 ישנא for ישנה ; Gen 42:43 להזכרה for לאזכרה ; אברך for הברך ; איך in Gen 26:9 but היך in 1 Chr 13:12 and Dan 10:17; Lev 24:7 להזכרה for לאזכרה ; Deut 3:11 הלה for הלא ; Ruth 1:20 מרא for מרה ; 1 Kgs 22:25, 2 Kgs 7:12 החבה but החבא in 2 Chr 18:24; Job 8:21 ימלה for ימלא ; Job 38:11 פה for פה ; Isa 44:8 תרדו for תראו ; 2 Chr 20:35 אתחבר for אתחבר ; Ez 14:3 האדרש for ההדרש ; Jer 25:3 אשכים for השכים ; Ps 76:6 אשתוללו for השתוללו ; Isa 63:3 אנאלתי for הנאלתי ; Jer 52:15 האמון for ההמון ; Hos 12:9 און for הון ; אדרם in 2 Sam 20:24 and 1 Kgs 12:18 but הדרם in 2 Chr 10:18; נאק in Ez 30:24 but נהק in Job 6:5; צנא in Num 32:24 but צנה Ps 8:8; דכה in Deut 23:2 but דכא in some MSS (*Tanach* [Jerusalem: Koren, 1983], 11 end); according to the Massorah, in the Land of Israel the reading in Dan 11:44 was חמה but in Babylon it was חמא ; etc.

⁸⁸ Gordis, *Job*, 336.

⁸⁹ Perhaps in Jer 25:37 נאות should be גוות . See also 2 Chr 22:6, where כי should be מן as in 2 Kgs 8:29.

⁹⁰ Johann F. Gaab, *Das Buch Hiob* (Tübingen: Cotta, 1809), 46.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² George R. Noyes, *The Book of Job* (Boston: Monroe, 1838), 56.

⁹³ Reider, “Etymological,” 128–29.

cially from disease (thus עי would be a synonym of קשה יום and אביון in the following verse);⁹⁴ (2) the phrase ישלח יד refers to God; (3) the problematic word להן is a conflate of two readings, the archaic לה and the later לו meaning “to him”; (4) להן = להו = לו + לה, because “the letters ו and ן easily interchange”;⁹⁵ and, שוע, a noun of the stem שוע, meaning “help” (as in the proper names אבישוע “my father is a help” and אלישוע “my God is a help”).⁹⁶ Unfortunately, these assumptions do not produce a cogent sense. Both the assertion and the rhetorical question would appear patently wrong to Job.

Tur-Sinai notes that “clearly שוע in the second stich does not mean ‘strength,’ or ‘wealth’ (as below, XXXIV, 19; see there), but—as suggested by both ancients and moderns—the crying for help (read: שוע) of a person in distress (פיד).” Somehow this observation leads him to the conclusion that “at least v. 24b (אם בפידו להן שוע) is to be joined to what is said of the poor and troubled in v. 25, and that this verse should precede v. 24.”⁹⁷ This reorganization results in a “hanging” v. 24a and the senseless couplet: “Did I not weep for those whose time was hard ... if he cried ... in his calamity ... Only against this heap of ruins let the destroyer not put forth his hand.”

Tur-Sinai understands לא אך, בעי, and ישלח יד in their regular sense, but takes להן = “because of them”; i.e., the calamities befalling the sufferer. However, this causative function of the prefixing ל is not attested in the Tanach (though Tur-Sinai points to לפיד לעשתות, 12:5). In his view, “it is natural for a man to cry out: only let not God stretch forth his hand against the heap of ruins that remains of my house.” One wonders why such a cry would be a natural reaction. How can a heap be any worse than being a heap? It does not seem that anyone adopted Tur-Sinai’s interpretation.

Verse 24 has been generally assumed to be textually defective, and the attempts to restore it have not produced a consensus reading. It continues to be a *crux interpretum* to this day.

Proposed Solution

The standard meaning for עי in the Tanach is “heap, ruin.” A major objection for accepting this meaning in v. 24 is that it would result in a “bizarre metaphor” of a heap crying for help. This perception is based on the assumption that in v. 24b there is “a cry for help.” However, as will be shown in this section, a cogent interpretation of v. 24 can be obtained without making such an assumption. The metaphor of Job being a “heap, or ruin” is rather remarkably apt in the context of his tragedy and by itself is not at all a “bizarre metaphor.”

Heap and ruin are alluded to twice in the Prologue (1:19, 2:8) and perhaps once in the Epilogue (42:6). The most poignant element in Job’s tragedy is the house collapsing “upon the young people and they died” (1:19). In the heap, the ruin that was once a place of happiness, all of Job’s children perished in a single event. From the little that we know of Job as a father, it is clear that he was caring and protective; it is also obvious that to raise such a large and mutually respectful family required considerable emotional and educational effort and investment. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the author presents Job as a person whose focus was his family. Indeed, only from such a perspective does the conflict in the book attain its full dra-

⁹⁴ Grabbe, *Comparative*, 103. Grabbe could not find in other Semitic languages any cognates for the Arabic root عى.

⁹⁵ Reider, “Etymological,” 129, note 2. However, it is notable that the *Ketib-Qere* apparatus does not attest to a ו/ן or a ן/ו confusion.

⁹⁶ Reider, “Etymological,” 129. Reider notes: “Evidently both stems שוע and ישע were used for the concept ‘help.’”

⁹⁷ Naphtali H. Tur-Sinai, *The Book of Job* (Jerusalem: Kiryath Sepher, 1967), 433.

matic force. Job's children, his flesh and blood, his pride, his future, his purpose in life, are all dead in the ruin of a house. Job's psychological personification of the ruin as his self is not only natural, but it is absolutely necessary for understanding his state of mind. Seeing his self as a ruin in which all that was worthwhile to live for lies dead meant that death lost its capability to inspire dread; it became less threatening, and even welcome.

Satan's inflicting "a severe inflammation of Job from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head" caused him to sit in a heap of ashes (אפר, 2:8). This heap of ashes was a constant reminder to "being and not being," because the Jobian debate apparently took place there. Also, the proverbial nature of "ashes to ashes" (עפר ואפר) kept alive, and perhaps reinforced, Job's self-identification with a ruin. It is notable that Job's confrontation with God ends with the words עפר ואפר, as if the word אפר serves as an *inclusio* for the entire debate. While Job's last words (42:6) are obscure and have been variously interpreted, it is possible that the last two words imply Job's readiness to die.⁹⁸ If correct, then Job's words in the entire debate should be construed as coming from the mouth of a man that is fearless of death.

In Job's view God would not send his hand (ישלח יד) in a hostile act against a person who has been already destroyed (עי). Such an act would be impractical and purposeless. This means that a person beset with the worst disaster, ironically attains a measure of immunity and freedom. He becomes inured to pain and learns how to manage misfortunes. Obviously, there is still the ultimate destruction—death. In v. 24b Job argues that there are calamities compared to which death is a relief and a desired outcome. Unfortunately, this perspective, which is a logical follow-on to the position expressed in v. 24a, cannot be deduced from MT because of a copyist's minor misreading of a couple of letters in the original text.

The root פיר is not used as a verb in the Tanach; only the masculine noun פִּיר occurs four times, three of which are in the Book of Job (12:5, 30:24, 31:29) and one in Prov 22:24. The noun פִּיר has been usually rendered "calamity, ruin, distress, affliction, disaster." These translations attempted to provide a parallel to עי "heap, ruin." However, the similarities of the root פִּיר with قَات "to die," i.e. قات IV "to destroy" (kindred مَات, מוּת), strongly suggest an escalating parallelism and the sense "extinction, death" for פִּיר (Gesenius 673a). Indeed, as was already mentioned, such a perspective was suggested by David Qimchi, Gaab, and Umbreit but was shunned by modern exegesis.⁹⁹ Obviously, the escalating parallelism imbues v. 24 with a richer meaning and greater emotional pathos, which better fit the closing words of the debate, than the platitude of a worn-out proverb.

In v. 24b, as has been shown, the most baffling word is להן, and in particular הן. Is this the original orthography of the word? Unfortunately, we know very little of the status of final letters (מֵן־קֵץ) prior to the beginning of the second century BCE. Hebrew paleo-script does not have final letters; thus it is reasonable to assume that the first biblical scrolls written in the square Aramaic script did not have them. In Tov's view the final letters started to evolve in the Persian Period, but were not used systematically.¹⁰⁰ Occasional occurrence of the final letters in the Dead Sea scrolls seems to indicate that they are older than the date of these scrolls (mid third century BCE – 68 CE).¹⁰¹ In the Severus Codex the final *mem* does not occur in several cases. Tov asserts: "Since the distinction between final letter and non-final letters was introduced rather late in the evolution of the MT, it is permissible to ignore the final letters in the

⁹⁸ Hakham, אִיּוֹב, 328, note 103.

⁹⁹ Mandelkern, *Concordantiae*, 948d. Mandelkern mentions the connection with Arabic "death."

¹⁰⁰ Tov, *Textual Criticism*, 167.

¹⁰¹ Frank M. Cross, "The Oldest Manuscripts from Qumran," *JBL* 74 (1955): 147–72, 150. Cross says that "so-called 'final' letters ... are used in late fifth-century and early-fourth century cursive, though not systematically." Apparently the introduction of the final letter was slow and sporadic.

reconstruction of previous phases of the MT.”¹⁰² It is reasonable to assume that when the Book of Job was written the final letters were not yet in use, and הַנ would have been written in the square script instead of הֵן in the MT.¹⁰³

In the Hebrew orthography of about 400 BCE, the left leg of current ה was not separated from the top. The ancient ה looked like the current ה with a top somewhat extended to the left.¹⁰⁴ In a densely written text הַנ was orthographically very similar to וַת. It is easy to imagine that a mechanical copyist visually confused between וַת and הַנ as a consequence of the ligature הַנ = וַת, writing לְהַנְשׁוּעַ instead of לְוַתְשׁוּעַ.¹⁰⁵ When the words in a verse were more clearly separated, the original text should have been לְוַתְשׁוּעַ לְוֵי תְשׁוּעַ instead MT לְהַנְשׁוּעַ.¹⁰⁶ Thus, the original לְוֵי (“to him”) corresponds perfectly to the 3rd person suffix of בְּפִידוֹ (“in his calamity”).

The word תְשׁוּעַ could be an abbreviation of תְשׁוּעָה. Abbreviations in general and particularly of the final ה were once common in the Tanach. After the exile of Judah, Aramaic became popular among the exiled, and the Aramaic script officially replaced the paleo-script. Tur-Sinai (1947: 73ff.) suggested that from Aramaic, in which abbreviations are frequent, the Israelites learned to do likewise in the Hebrew Bible. The Massoretes eventually replaced these abbreviations with the corresponding words. However, in some places they apparently did not recognize the abbreviation or mistook a legitimate word for an abbreviation.¹⁰⁷

G. R. Driver notes that “A very common abbreviation is the omission of the feminine singular.”¹⁰⁸ For instance, one finds in Isa 6:13 בַּמ instead of בַּמָּה (1 QIs^a), 2 Chr 20:25 בַּהֵמ instead

¹⁰² Tov, *Textual Criticism*, 203.

¹⁰³ Many date the Book of Job as being from the sixth to fourth century. For instance, Albright says: “it remains exceedingly probable that the author of Job lived in the cosmopolitan atmosphere of the sixth or fifth century B.C., and he was certainly conversant with a wide range of lost pagan Northwest-Semitic literature, though Hebrew was still his literary (probably no longer his spoken) language” (W. F. Albright, “Some Canaanite-Phoenician Source of Hebrew Wisdom,” in M. Noth and D. W. Thomas, eds., *Wisdom in Israel and in the Ancient Near East* [VTSup 3; Leiden: Brill, 1955], 1–15, 14).

¹⁰⁴ Frank M. Cross, “The Development of the Jewish Scripts,” in G. Ernest Wright, ed., *The Bible and the Ancient Near East, Essays in Honor of W.F. Albright* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1961), 137, Fig. 1.

¹⁰⁵ A somewhat similar confusion has been identified by Pinker in Qoh 5:9, where a break in the upper left corner of the original הַת in בַּהֲמַת may have resulted in a scribe’s reading this single letter as וַת, and thus copying it as בַּהֲמוֹנֵי. Cf. Aron Pinker, “On Cattle and Cowboys in Kohelet 5,9b,” *ZAW* 123 (2011): 263–73.

¹⁰⁶ Indeed, Ehrlich (*Randglossen*, 300) felt that “für להֵן שׁוּעַ hat man לְוֵי תְשׁוּעָה zu lesen,” but he does not explain how such a reading can be justified orthographically.

¹⁰⁷ Naphtali H. Tur-Sinai, *משלי שלמה* (Tel Aviv: Yavneh, 1947), 73. Tur-Sinai points, for instance, to Num 23:10, where וּמִסְפָּר should be מִסְפָּר; Deut 32:35, where לֵי should be לַיִם; Jos 8:9, where הַעַם should be הַעֲמֵק; Jud 1:16, where הַעַם should be הַעֲמֵלְקִי; 1 Kgs 9:17, where בְּאֲרֵץ should be בְּאֲרָם; 2 Kgs 6:27, where אֵל should be אִם; Ps 89:51, where כָּל should be כָּלֵמֶת; 2 Sam 4:2, where בַּעֲנָה should be בֶּן עֲנָה; etc. Cf. also M. Fishbane, “Abbreviations, Hebrew Texts,” in *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* (K. R. Crim, et al., eds.; Nashville: Abingdon, 1976), 3–4; M. Naor, “קיצורים וראשי – תבות בכתובים כפולֵי גִירסָא,” in M. Haran and B. Luria, eds., *Sepher Tur – Sinai* (Jerusalem: Kiryat Sepher, 1960), 104; G. R. Driver, “Abbreviations in the Massoretic Text,” *Textus* 1 (1960): 112–31; idem, “Once Again Abbreviations,” *Textus* 2 (1962): 76–94; and Felix Perles, *Analekten zur Textkritik des Alten Testaments, neue Folge* (Leipzig: Engel, 1922), 4–35; II, 1–10.

¹⁰⁸ G. R. Driver, “Once Again,” 78. Driver (93–94) notes that “the recognition of hidden abbreviations in the MT can thus be used for the recovery of the original text without emendation. The method, however, must be used with circumspection and due regard for the rules. These are, briefly, that only certain categories of terms are subject to abbreviation, namely: terminations, including pronominal elements; independent pronouns; ...”

of בהמה (LXX: κτήνη), Prov 30:14 מארמו instead of מארמה (parallel to מארץ), 2 Sam 13:20 MT ושממה ותשב תמר and ותשב תמר' ושממה should be understood as ותשב תמר' ושממה, or fully written ותשב ותשב תמר' ושממה, etc. Many cases in which the final ה is missing (or there is an extra final ה) are attested to in the *Ketib-Qere* apparatus.¹⁰⁹ One finds the phrase לו תשועה in Ps 146:3 and לכם תשועה in 1 Sam 11:9. The possibility that תשועה is an abbreviation of תשועה, or that its omission is a scribal error, is well-founded.

BDB (448a) takes תְּשׁוּעָה = יְשׁוּעָה “deliverance, salvation.” It notes that תְּשׁוּעָה was formed by false analogy, as if it was derived from the root שׁוּע, in sense of יִשׁע. Though many assign תְּשׁוּעָה to the root שׁוּע, in BDB's view this is not justified; since there is no sufficient evidence that there exists a root שׁוּע with a meaning similar to that of יִשׁע.¹¹⁰ This seems to be a prudent position. The word תְּשׁוּעָה, in the sense “deliverance, salvation,” is well attested in the Tanach.

In v. 24b the meaning “deliverance, salvation” for תְּשׁוּעָה gives the verse a sense that completes perfectly the thought of v. 24a. Job begins v. 24 by stating that God would not stretch out his hand with a hostile intent against a person that is ruined, and in v. 24b he provides the rationalization: because in some cases the afflicted might see his ultimate calamity (פִּידוֹ) as his salvation and deliverance. That Job counts his self among these cases has been obvious through the entire debate, since already in his opening speech he launched the complaint that God prolongs cruelly the life of the miserable “Who rejoice to exultation, and are glad to reach the grave// To the man who's way is veiled, whom God has hedged about” (3:22–23). In his second speech Job asks God to complete his destruction: “Would that my request were granted, that God gave me what I wished for// Would that God consented to crush me, loose his hand and cut me off” (6:8–9). Yet, God does not seem willing to acquiesce. These observations lead him to the conclusion expressed in v. 24: God would not destroy completely (cause the death of) a person, if that person sees in such calamity his deliverance. This observation is not some proverbial truism, but a deep insight into the symbiosis between God and man.

Already in his first response to Eliphaz, Job makes use of the symbiosis between God and man to advance the point that God must have some tolerance of sinners, and make his actions more transparent. His wish for death in 7:15–21, leads him to a powerful theological argument, the core of which is that God needs man and therefore has to be tolerant of their shortcomings. Even if man sins, what can he do about it? After all, the One who guards [נֹצֵר] and hovers over man is also his Creator [יֹצֵר] (7:20). If He does not like what He has, then He should remove this obstacle, saving trouble both for Himself and man. Now Job makes his crucial point: “And what? You would not suffer my sin and forgo my transgression? So now in dust I will lie, and You will seek me and I will be no more” (7:21). If God cannot leave man alone (7:19), give him some room, but would rather be particular about each of his transgressions and unforgiving, who would be left? Would He still be God if none of His worshippers survives? Death would remove God's potential worshippers, force Him to seek out man, but he will be no more.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ For instance, in Prov 8:17 אהביה (*Ketib*) but אהבי (*Qere*); Prov 27:10 ורעה (*K*) but ערו (*Q*); Ruth 1:8 יעשה (*K*) but יעש (*Q*); Lam 3:10 אריה (*K*) but ארי (*Q*); Isa 54:16 הן (*K*) but הנה (*Q*); Gen 27:3 צידה (*K*) but ציד (*Q*); Jos 7:21 ואראה (*K*) but וארא (*Q*); Jos 24:8 ואביאה (*K*) but ואביא (*Q*); 2 Sam 21:12 שם (*K*) but שמה (*Q*); 2 Sam 21:9 והם (*K*) but והמה (*Q*); 2 Sam 23:20 האריה (*K*) but הארי (*Q*); 1 Kgs 7:23 וקוה (*K*) but וקו (*Q*); Jer 3:5 ותראה (*K*) but ותרא (*Q*); Jer 18:10 הרעה (*K*) but הרע (*Q*); Jer 31:38 קוה (*K*) but קו (*Q*); Jer 43:11 ובאה (*K*) but ובא (*Q*); Jer 15:9 באה (*K*) but בא (*Q*); Jer 48:27 נמצאה (*K*) but נמצא (*Q*); Ez 23:43 עת instead of עתה; Ez 42:40 ומתחתה (*K*) but ומתחת (*Q*); Mic 3:2 רעה (*K*) but רע (*Q*); Zec 1:17 וקוה (*K*) but וקו (*Q*); Ps 51:4 הרבה (*K*) but הרב (*Q*); etc.

¹¹⁰ For instance, already Rashbam claimed that תשועה is derived from שוע as תשובה is from שוב as תרומה from רום and תנופה from נוף.

¹¹¹ Aron Pinker, “Job's Perspectives on Death,” *JBQ* 35 (2007): 73–84.

Such a symbiosis between God and man, coupled with a death wish of a man that was subject to the worst of personal tragedies, returns to the ruined Job his Godlike image (צלם אלהים). He has experienced the worst—nothing can be more devastating, he is fearless of death—it would be deliverance; granting his death-wish God would lose his victim. These observations restore Job's footing as a litigant. They enable him to state his case in a straightforward manner. He can now without fear accuse God that He did not keep His obligations in the contract implied by Retribution Doctrine. Job says: "I looked forward to good fortune, but evil came, I hoped for light, but darkness came" (v. 26).¹¹²

The proposed reading of v. 24 and its interpretation fit the context admirably. In Chapter 30 Job describes his current suffering; that which is caused by man (vv. 1–15) and by God (vv. 16–31). However, the unit dealing with God-caused suffering, beginning with a typical ועתה, is not just a listing of heavenly injustices inflicted upon Job. The author breaks masterfully this list at the critical v. 24, turning the second part into an accusation; vv. 16–22 being a description of *what is*, and vv. 26–31 describing *what should not have been*, if God kept his part of the contract implied by Retribution Doctrine. Verse 23 serves as a transition to the critical v. 24.

The author includes in vv. 19–23 words that clearly associate with v. 24 and imbue it with its critical meaning. These words are: כָּעָפָר וְאָפֶר (v. 19), אֲשֻׁנֶּה (v. 20), יָדָהּ (v. 21), רִיחַ (v. 22), and מָוֶת (v. 23). Job is now not only כָּעָפָר וְאָפֶר "like dust and ashes" the עֵי "heap, ruin" of v. 24a, but also practically dead as in the proverbial use of "ashes to ashes" (עָפָר וְאָפֶר). His crying to God (אֲשֻׁנֶּה) for deliverance goes unanswered (v. 20), and Job finds his deliverance (תְּשׁוּעָה) in death (v. 24b). God's powerful hand afflicting Job (v. 21b), has practical limitation—"what can it do against a ruin?" (v. 24a).¹¹³ In v. 22 the author alludes to the "wind" (רִיחַ) that collapsed the house (בֵּית in v. 23b), in which all of Job's children were killed (מָוֶת in v. 23a). This event is obviously the crucial element in making Job fearless of death (בְּפִירוֹ לוֹ) (תְּשׁוּעָה). Finally, מָוֶת (v. 23a) clearly associates with פִּיר, demonstrating that here פִּיר = "death" as its cognate Arabic.

In v. 24 the author combined these associations into one powerful statement, in which human adaptability and resignation could imbue man with dignity and intrepidity. Job states: "But, not at a ruin would he send his hand, if in his death [is] for him deliverance" (אֵךְ לֹא-בְעֵי) (ישלח יד אֵם-בְּפִירוֹ לוֹ תְּשׁוּעָה). He is obviously aware that he will eventually die: "I know You will bring me to death, the house of all living" (v. 23). But until this unknown natural event occurs Job will be immune to punishment and fearless of death. This gives him true freedom to speak his mind and express his deep disappointment and frustration, that God did not abide by the dicta of Retribution Doctrine (v. 26). Job lives in the misery of physical pain (v. 27), he is enveloped in gloom (v. 28), he is ostracized (v. 29), his body is deteriorating (v. 30), and his

¹¹² It seems that v. 25 has been misplaced. Its proper place is after v. 31:18. Gordis (*Commentary*, 337) says: "The v. is transposed to that chap. [31] on the ground that it is inappropriate here." Driver and Gray (*Commentary* 2, 259) also note that "reading in ²⁴ אֵם לֹא for אֵךְ לֹא, and rendering, If I have not stretched ... If I have not wept, both verses would fit well in c. 31." Furthermore, Duhm rightly points to the reason for v. 25 being inappropriate in its MT position by making the observation (Bernhard Duhm, *Das Buch Hiob erklärt* [KHC; Tübingen: Mohr, 1897], 144):

Nach der Meinung der Exegeten soll Hiob nun v. 25 auch sein moralisches Recht, um Hilfe zu schreien, beweisen wollen: er habe nämlich früher geweint über das Unglück anderer und sei über den Armen betrübt gewesen. Warum hat er die Armut nicht lieber gehoben? Wie sollte der Dichter den Nachweis, dass Hiob schreien muss, so kläglich durch eine solche moralische Reflexion haben vererben können!

¹¹³ Reider, "Etymological," 127–28. Reider, too, felt that "the verse in question seems to set a limit to the willful power of God, declaring that it does not extend to the weak."

lot is one of sadness and mourning (v. 31). This should not have been the fate of a man that is “blameless and upright; fears God and shuns evil” (1:1).¹¹⁴

Moreover, v. 24, as interpreted here, is the logical foundation for his concluding “protestation of innocence” in the following chapter. Only a person who has reached the state of being a ruin and seeing in death his salvation has also attained the fortitude, integrity, and honesty to make his words unquestionably believable and acceptable. His drive for restitution should be heard. For as Fohrer said: “Für Hiob ist es grundlegend durch den Wunsch und das Drängen nach Wiederherstellung bestimmt (29,2; 31,35–37). Bis dieses Ziel aber erreicht ist, scheint ihm die Klage nötig und berechtigt.”¹¹⁵

Conclusion

The *crux interpretum* Job 30:24 has been typically rendered by the following translations, or variants thereof.

1. “Does not a sinking person stretch out his hand or does he not cry for help in his destruction?”
2. “Did I not stretch out a helping hand to the poor and was he not saved by me in his misfortune?”
3. “But I did not want to lay hands on him when in his misfortune he begged for mercy.”
4. “But he-Death-does not lay hands at request, when one might be helped with the last thrust.”

It is difficult to anchor these interpretations in the text and they appear to be too simplistic for the Jobian context. One might doubt that the author would exploit his masterful edifice of a unique human tragedy for a recitation of proverbial banalities.

It seems more likely, that before making his protestation of innocence Job would explain why it should be taken seriously, as an honest statement of a person that has experienced the worst and is fearless of death. Such an explanation is provided in the proposed reading of v. 24. Assuming only that MT resulted from a mechanical copyist’s visual confusion between וַת and הַת (as a consequence of the ligature וַת = הַת) the following cogent text is obtained:

But,
not at a ruin would he send his hand,
if in his death [is] for him deliverance,¹¹⁶

אֵךְ
לֹא-בָעִי יִשְׁלַח יָדִי
אִם-בְּפִירוֹ לֹא תִשׁוּעָה

which can be paraphrased: “God would not destroy completely (cause the death of) a person, if that person sees in such calamity his deliverance.”

The proposed reading highlights the symbiosis between man and God, and the practical limitations of God’s power vis-à-vis man. It serves as the logical foundation for the concluding “protestation of innocence” in the following chapter. Job, reduced to the state of a ruin and seeing in death his salvation, has simultaneously attained the fortitude, integrity, and honesty to make his words unquestionably believable and acceptable. His drive for restitution, according to the Doctrine of Retribution, must be heard.

¹¹⁴ For instance, Fohrer (*Hiob*, 421) understands v. 24 as follows: “30,24–27 Die Berechtigung der Klage. Von Gott angefeindet, von Krankheit geschlagen, von den Menschen verspottet—das ist die Lage Hiobs, in der er ganz Schmerz und Anklage ist.”

¹¹⁵ Fohrer, *Hiob*, 421.

¹¹⁶ The implied verb “[is]” is included only for the sake of the English translation.