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  הָנָּה = הָות 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.

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’.”⁵ Habel observes that “the text of this verse is so obscure that some editors do not attempt a translation. The emendations are legions.”⁶ 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 [לוּא־יִשָּׁלַח יָד ל֖וֹ בְעֵ֣י אָ֣כַל מֵאָֽלָה־שָׁמָּ֑נָה]?”⁷ Obviously, this literal translation is gibberish.

¹ Georg Beer, Der Text des Buches Hiob (Marburg: Elwert, 1897), 197.
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 pur-
port of the verse seems to be contradictory to the argument of the passage. The burden of the ar-
gument 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 בְּעִי, ‘to them’ (feminine plural), has no referent, and the
meaning of the noun בֵּית 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 בֵּית and the referent of the phrase יָשָּׁלֵה יָד, and in v. 24b
a verb seems to be missing and בְּעִי 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 לח 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” (לָהֶן שַׁוְעָה לֹא בְּעִי אֲשֶׁר יָשָּׁלֵה לָהֶן יִשָּׁלֵה אֶל בְּעִי), 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 ἐμαυτὸν χειρώσασθαι, ἢ δεηθείς γε ἑτέρου, καὶ ποιήσει μοι τοῦτο). In this paraphrastic translation, the Septuagint reads apparently ἡ “Oh That” (Εἰ γὰρ) instead of MT לֹא; בְּעִי “upon myself” (ἐμαυτὸν) instead of MT יָשָּׁלֵה יָד; and, יָשָּׁלֵה לָהֶן “he should do this for me” (ἡ δεηθείς) instead of MT שוע לָהֶן. Every word in the MT was read differently.


Schlottmann, Das Buch Hiob [Berlin: Weigand and Grieben, 1851], 398 and 400).


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 extinc-
tion…”

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 בְּעַצְמִי.
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 in rage let him send his plagues but in times of pains let him receive their prayers” (וכלל אל בחרה איש מהתיה את ענינו纯电动יה יבהר אל תונון). Targum (Jonathan) takes מכה as “in rage” (בחרה), though this sense is not attested in the Tanach or later Hebrew; seems to be reading אורי "his plagues" (מהתיה) instead of MT אviar; and, only מעטיר עציר instead of let him receive their prayers” (יקבל צעריה בעדן אין מחתיה יישלח ברתחא לא לחוד). This version understands בחרה as “strike to his bones” (לגרמיה לא ברם); seems to read אידו instead of MT יד; אם־בפידו as “but for his sore” (בחטטי אין מחתיה ירגג עליה לא ברם); and, שוע להן as “let him set them a plaster” (אספלעיתא להון ישוי בחטטי אין מחתיה ירגג עליה לא ברם).

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” (נפרקני להו דוגית ומא אידה נושט עליה לא ברם). The Peshitta seems to read בעי as “against me” (עלי) instead of MT בעי; ידו as “his hand” (אידה) instead of MT יד; אם־בפידו as “and when I cry” (דוגעת ומא לו); and, שוע להן as “let him save me” (אספלעיתא להון ישוי עליה לא ברם).

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 consuptionem eorum emittis manum tuam et si conruerint ipse salvabis). The Vulgate takes בחרה as “to their consumption” (ad consuptionem eorum); reads ישלך as “you will send” (emittis manum tuam) instead of MT ישלח; קריו instead of MT אдор; אם־בפידו as “and if they fall” (et si conruerint); and, שוע להן as “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.”

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 (משעשען) with some consolation. It seems that Rashi derives the meaning of שוע from the root שעע. 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...
to him (v. 21). Rashbam derives the meaning of שוע from the noun שועה “salvation.”

Qara (eleventh-twelfth centuries) capitalizes on the word שוע considering it to have the meaning “assembly, or collection” as שועה (Mic 1:6) is the heap of rocks that is cleared from a field. He understands שוע 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). If God would assent to this request, then Job would consider these punishments as consolations (כותרת אורה או רחמים) as therapy (רממות אורו או רחמים).

Ibn Ezra (1089–c. 1164) renders שוע 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 נשמה (“souls”) to which מחלל refers and takes דרבות שוע = נדיבות (“generosity”). Nachmanides (1194–1270) also assumes that שוע 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 (נפשות) 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 because all travails of life cease in death. Gersonides (1288–1344) only notes that שוע = עני = “prayer” (from בעה) or “devastation” (from(unique) עין, 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.” 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)?

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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.
18 Reider, “Etymological,” 128.
Recent exegesis considers v. 24 an expression of an obvious social norm. It is socially improper to kick a person when he is down. When such person cries out for help human decency requires that he should be helped. 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.” He takes the various components of the verse to mean as follows.

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

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

בעי = “against any needy person.” If the word is derived from the Hebrew root בָּעַי “inquire, cause to swell or boil up” (Isa 21:12, 30:13, 64:1, Ob 1), as from בָּעַי אֲדֹלֶם and בָּעַי בְּכָל, then it has nothing to do with being needy. Both Arabic بِعُي and Aramaic בְּכָל could mean “seek” and thus “plead.” It is difficult to see how בָּעַי could be associated with the poor. Ehrlich says: “In בָּעַי ist Beth stammhaft. Das Wort ist Substantiv und heisset Bitte; vgl. die daraus kontrahierte Partikel בָּא.” However, Hengstenberg already noted that “Allein ein Nomen]!=Beth gesichert ist.” Hitzig ob-
served that “ein Wort ‘בקש’ Bitte existiert im Semitischen überhaupt nicht.” 33 Mandelkern notes that in the word ‘בקש’ is likely prefixed by the ב of utility. 34 However, if the substantive בקש is assumed then one has also to accept that a prefixed ב was dropped by haplography.

Guillaume compares ימ with Arabic ق重要意义 “weak, helpless.” 35 This comparison would allow the meaning “at any poor” for ‘בקש’. However, Grabbe says:

The major question, though, is whether the Ar root ימ 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 ימ “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 ימ, 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 ימ and בקש constitutes significant support for this view.

Driver and Gray observe that “for يم/Q, as لَا يُشَقِّي لَهُنَا, 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 ב 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 ימ and reads instead ימ “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 ימ. The parallel word to ימ is usually ימ (cf. 24:4, 14).” 42 The Ketib-Qere apparatus attests to the possibility of a missing or extra ימ.

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33 Ferdinand Hitzig, Das Buch Hiob übersetzt und erklärt (Leipzig: Winter, 1874), 225.
34 Mandelkern, Concordantiae, 226b.
36 Grabbe, Comparative, 102.
37 Grabbe, Comparative, 103. However, the meaning “needy” for يم 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.
41 Pope, Job, 222. So render also Beer (Hiob, 197); Kissane (Job,193); Habel (Job, 416); Konkel (Job, 178); etc.
43 One finds, for instance, Jud 4:11 يמ for רָאָשָׁת בֶּצֶקֶם; Prov 3:15 ימ for רַעְשָׁת בֶּצֶקֶם; Prov 15:14 ימ for רַעְשָׁת בֶּצֶקֶם; 2 Sam 21:6 ימ for רַעְשָׁת בֶּצֶקֶם; 1 Kgs 17:14 ימ for רַעְשָׁת בֶּצֶקֶם; Jer 42:6 ימ for רַעְשָׁת בֶּצֶקֶם. Also, we have in Prov 8:17 ימ instead of יְשַׁוֵּעַ instead of יְשַׁוֵּעַ. 
A New Attempt to Interpret Job 30:24

Early modern exegesis, following classical Jewish exegesis (Ibn Ezra, Qimchi), understood יִשְׁלַח־יָד as a euphemism for “grave” (Todten-Hügel).\(^{44}\) Schlottmann considers “grave” (Grab) “frei-
litch nicht hinlänglich begründeten Bedeutung.”\(^{46}\) Hahn argued that the parallelism between יִשְׁלַח־יָד and אֶשְׁלֵח־יָד means that “demnach kann das ב nur Präposition seyn, und יִשְׁלַח־יָד muss abgeleitet werden von יִשְׁלַח־יָד verkehren, zerstören, umstürzen.”\(^{46}\) He takes יִשְׁלַח־יָד to mean “collapse, bad fall” (Sturz). Thus, יִשְׁלַח־יָד would reflect Job’s destroyed life, and this destruction would parallel the cal-
lamity in v. 24b. However, in the Tanach I stretch out my hand (against). “This translation assumes that the text was אֶשְׁלֵח־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 נָשָׁא confusion in 1 Sam 22:18 and 22; all being יִשְׁלַח־יָד (K) and אֶשְׁלֵח־יָד (Q). One also finds, for instance, in 2 Kgs 8:15 יָד instead of לְהָם, and לְהָם for יִשְׁלַח־יָד in 1 Sam 14:19 and Mic 6:10, perhaps to soften the expression. Thus, the נָשָׁא confusion is rather rare. Moreover, as Beer noted יִשְׁלַח־יָד / אֶשְׁלֵח־יָד does not mean “stretch out a hand.” This meaning is properly expressed by יַטְפָּר.\(^{55}\)

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.\(^{46}\) 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 MT יִשְׁלַח־יָד instead of MT אֶשְׁלֵח־יָד to assume that the original הים יִשְׁלַח־יָד was derived from יַטְפָּר. Relying on the Arabic ًلا “wander, rove” (umherrinnen), Hufnagel somehow obtains for MT יִשְׁלַח־יָד the meaning “droht er ihm Untergang” (Wilhelm F. Hufnagel, Hiob [Erlangen: Palmisch, 1781], 215. Note also that BDB (223a) has for יִשְׁלַח־יָד the meaning “droht er ihm Untergang” (Wilhelm F. Hufnagel, Hiob [Erlangen: Palmisch, 1781], 215. Note also that BDB (223a) has for יִשְׁלַח־יָד the meaning “droht er ihm Untergang” (Wilhelm F. Hufnagel, Hiob [Erlangen: Palmisch, 1781], 215. Note also that BDB (223a) has for יִשְׁלַח־יָד the meaning “droht er ihm Untergang.”

\(^{46}\) Gordis, Job, 336. This meaning for יַטְפָּר has been adopted also by Gersonides (Mikraot Gedolot, ad loc.); Heymann Arneim, Das Buch Job übersetzt und vollständig commentirt (Glogau: Prausnitz, 1836), 180; A. Z. Rabinovitz, and A. Abronin, ספר הים (Jaffa: Shushni, 1916), 73; Amos Hakham, תְּפָר (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 1981), 231; etc.

\(^{47}\) 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.”

\(^{48}\) Reider, “Etymological,” 127.

\(^{49}\) Delitzsch, Hiob, 79. Similarly, Dillmann (Hiob, 262) has “collapse” (Einsturz).

\(^{50}\) Ewald, Commentary, 281.

\(^{51}\) Terrien, Job, 179. So also renders Good (Job, 131).

\(^{52}\) Foehr, Hiob, 414.

\(^{53}\) This emendation has been adopted also by Beer (Hiob, 197); Kissane (Job, 193), Dhorme (Job, 445), Habel (Job, 416), etc.

\(^{54}\) Beer, Hiob, 197. Hirzel avers that “דֶּה הַר הֵבָה יַטְפָּר יַטְפָּר יַטְפָּר Klag. 1, 17 (vgl. Spr. 31, 20), oder דֶּה הַר יַטְפָּר יַטְפָּר יַטְפָּר 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 יַטְפָּר יַטְפָּר יַטְפָּר do nor they mean “die Hand ausstrecken nach Hülfe.”

\(^{55}\) Ehrlich, Randglossen, 300.
(Ps 144:7). 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.” Pope takes the idiom רָאָה 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. Habel considers v. 24 linked thematically to v. 25 and renders רָאָה by “strike.”

In their calamity.” This translation is equivalent to reading מָוֶת instead of MT מָוֶת. Arnheim notes that such pars pro toto understanding “ist unserm Job eigen. Vgl. 13, 27, 28; 14, 3.” The word מָוֶת occurs only four times in the Tanach, most of them in the Book of Job.

Regarding רָאָה, Umbreit says: “Da … das Stammw. im Arab. סתר בנ bedeutet, scheint es passend, das Wort hier in seiner Grundbedeutung von mors zu nehmen.” Delitzsch reads מָוֶת = “in ruin” (im Verderben). Hakham notes that מָוֶת is kindred to מָוֶת (Prov 24:22) and designates a disaster (31:29, 12:5). Ehrlich arbitrarily understands מָוֶת as meaning “wenn einem mit dem letzten Stoss.” The suffix in מָוֶת could refer to God or the afflicted.

מָוֶת = “they.” This interpretation seemingly reads מָוֶת (feminine) instead of MT מָוֶת. Hakham suggests that מָוֶת refers to death (Prov 24:22) and the netherworld (Hebrew שָדָי) of the preceding verse. However, both מָוֶת and מָוֶת are masculine nouns. Hahn says on מָוֶת: “Vielmehr ist es einfach die 3. Pers. Fem. Pl. die neutrisch gebraucht ist: darüber, dass es nämlich so ist, vgl. Ruth 1, 13.”

מָוֶת “to them (feminine)” does not seem to have a suitable meaning or referent in the context. Hengstenberg arbitrarily suggested an implied מָוֶת, to which מָוֶת refers. Dillmann says that מָוֶת wofür מָוֶת in einige MSS. blosse Correctur ist, hier wie מָוֶת (Ruth 1,13. Dan. 2,6)

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57 Gordis, Job, 336. However, the use of רָאָה 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 רָאָה of Ps 144:7 belongs to Ps 144:6. It seems that the idiom רָאָה 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 רָאָה in Ps 18:16 and 138:7. He associates this phrase with in the preceding verse: “die Hand reichen, um mich zurückzuführen in den Tod.” Hengstenberg (Hiob, 214) says that רָאָה has “hier sensu bono, um ihm zu helfen.”

58 Hahn, Hiob, 243–44.
59 Pope, Job, 223.
60 Habel, Job, 414.
61 Kennicott and 2(3) de Rossi MSS have מָוֶת. 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 Verlängen, wenn einem mit dem letzten Stoss geholfen wäre.” This interpretation makes no sense.
67 Schottmann, Hiob, 398. Schottmann observes: “יפיק” nehmen viele Ausleger für מָוֶת (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 Schottmann (Hiob, 398); Arnheim (Hiob, 180); A. Z. Rabinovitch, and A. Abronin, איוב (Jaffa: Shushni, 1916), 73.
69 Hahn, Hiob, 244. However, Hahn’s translation of יִשְׂרָאֵל as having its regular hostile sense “send the hand against” seems to be assuming that יִשְׂרָאֵל = מָוֶת.
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 ב/ית confusion only in two cases (Jer 21:12 [K] but שׁוּעַ [Q] and Jer 49:30 שׁוּעַ [K] but שִׁוֵּעַ [Q]).72 Hirzel also reads שׁוּעַ but assumes that the original was the dative שׁוּעַ, an Akkadian form of the Pronoun demonstrating, which corresponds to the Hebrew שׁוּעַ.73 Hitzig says: “לֹא also nach bekannter Enallage des Numerus (37, 12. Am. 9, 11. Jes. 49, 15.) auf נ ל um so mehr, da auch שׁוּעַ לֹא כ ב י ו שׁוּעַ (Ps. 55, 21.) gesagt wird.”74 Dhorme reads פיד “to me” instead of the MT נְשַׁוֵּעַ.75 Kissane emends נְשַׁוֵּעַ to נְשַׁוֵּעַ לְדִין for redress.”76 However, the Ketib-Qere apparatus does not attest to a ב/ית confusion. Terrien seems to have deleted נְשַׁוֵּעַ.77 Obviously, the word נְשַׁוֵּעַ in v. 24 is difficult and did not find a reasonable interpretation.

In the thought that it would be more correct to read "Es ist mir nicht hülfreiche Hand anlegen, oder hätte sie an deren Verderben Gewinn?" This translation does not result in a meaningful sentence. Though Delitzsch cavalierly observes: “Lehrreich ist, dass ein ursprünglich geschriebenes נְשַׁוֵּעַ ohne Weiteres als נְשַׁוֵּעַ gedeutet und dementsprechend als נְשַׁוֵּעַ überliefert werden konnte.” Fohrer, Hiob, 414.

The Textual Criticism of the Bible: an Introduction (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1989), 811a; BDB (1002b); etc.

Dillmann u. a.) statt des unübersetzbaren Schreibfehlers zu lesen. “

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

They cried out.” Delitzsch hypothesizes that נְשַׁוֵּעַ וּלְדִין 30, 24 is Unsinn, man erwartet etwa: נְשַׁוֵּעַ לָיִל נְשַׁוֵּעַ; die falsche Schreibung der Negation בּ נְשַׁוֵּעַ als נְשַׁוֵּעַ (ebenso Dt. 3, 11; vgl. den umgekehrten Fall 38, 11 נְשַׁוֵּעַ statt נְשַׁוֵּעַ) hat die Verwirrung veranlasst.”84 Fohrer says: “Es ist nicht möglich, נְשַׁוֵּעַ (Dillmann u. a.) statt des unübersetzbaren Schreibfehlers zu lesen.”85 Beer thought that it would be more correct to read נְשַׁוֵּעַ instead of נְשַׁוֵּעַ לְדִין (where we have מִני for מִלְךָ) and Dan 2:6 (where we have מִלְךָ for מִלְךָ).

71 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 נְשַׁוֵּעַ instead of נְשַׁוֵּעַ. It seems that this confusion occurs also in Ruth 1:14 (where we have מִני for מִלְךָ) and Dan 2:6 (where we have מִלְךָ for מִלְךָ).

72 Hitzig, Hiob, 181.

73 Dillmann, Hiob, 400.

74 Hitzig, Hiob, 226.

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

76 Kissane, Job, 194.

77 Terrien, Job 179.

78 Clines, Job 21–37, 957. Clines adopts the emendation of MT נְשַׁוֵּעַ לְדִין to נְשַׁוֵּעַ לְדִין.

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

80 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.

81 Dillmann, Hiob, 231.

82 Hitzig, Hiob, 400.

83 Schloßmann, Hiob, 400.

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

85 Beer, Hiob, 414.

86 Beer, Hiob, 197. נְשַׁוֵּעַ occurs in 2 Kennicott and 1 De Rossi MSS. The reading נְשַׁוֵּעַ is supported by Peshitta's נְשַׁוֵּעַ and Vulgate's salvabis. Beer translates v. 24: “Habe ich nicht hülfreiche Hand angelegt an den Elenden und wurde er nicht in seinem Unglück [von mir] gerettet.” He finds this translation contextually fitting.
A New Attempt to Interpret Job 30:24

Singular Interpretations

Among the earlier exegetes, Gaab felt that to understand v. 24 one has to take: (1) the ב as a prefix and ב = “grave” (Todtenhügel); (2) ל, which otherwise means “calamity,” as having the meaning “death,” relying on the Arabic لما ("wenigstens ist so viel als ما يتلبس”); (3) the ל in לָיְבַל = “weak,” relying on the Arabic [debilis fuit]; and, (4) רושמ = שון. He obtains for v. 24 the proverbial saying: “But at the grave he would not send a hand, the weak is helpless when he dies.”

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 dürften.” In this translation it is being assumed that ב means stands for בקעת, and relying on the Arabic ينفي is “injustice” (injustitia, vis iniqua), while ل 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.” Noyes takes in v. 24a ל = “when” (unattested in the Tanach); ב = “nothing” (unattested in the Tanach); ב = “prayer” (unattested in the Tanach); and, adds “avails.” In v. 24b he takes ב = “when,” but that could be the case only if ב is followed by a perfect [cf. BDB, 50a (4)]; י = “vain” (reading הובאל?); 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?” He obtains this sense for the verse by making the following assumptions: (1) the difficult ב is a cognate of the Arabic ينفي meaning “unable, impotent” espe-

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87 Compare 2 Kgs 25:29 וַיִּקְצָּה and Jer 52:33 וַיִּקְצָּה. See, for instance, in Lam 4:11 וַיִּקְצָּה for וַיִּקְצָּה; Gen 42:43 וַיִּקְצָּה for וַיִּקְצָּה; Deut 3:11 וַיִּקְצָּה for וַיִּקְצָּה; Ruth 1:20 וַיִּקְצָּה for וַיִּקְצָּה; Jer 25:17 וַיִּקְצָּה for וַיִּקְצָּה; Ez 14:3 וַיִּקְצָּה for וַיִּקְצָּה. See also 1 Chr 13:12 and Dan 10:17; Lev 24:7 for וַיִּקְצָּה; 1 Kgs 22:25, 2 Kgs 7:12 לָיְבַל; but לָיְבַל is in 2 Chr 18:24; Job 8:21 לָיְבַל for לָיְבַל; Job 38:19 לָיְבַל for לָיְבַל; Is 44:8 לָיְבַל for לָיְבַל; 2 Chr 30:35 לָיְבַל for וַיִּקְצָּה; Ez 14:3 לָיְבַל for וַיִּקְצָּה; Jer 25:17 לָיְבַל for וַיִּקְצָּה; Ps 76:6 לָיְבַל for וַיִּקְצָּה; Is 63:3 לָיְבַל for וַיִּקְצָּה; Jer 52:15 לָיְבַל for לָיְבַל; Hos 12:9 לָיְבַל for לָיְבַל; 2 Sam 20:24 and 1 Kgs 12:18 לָיְבַל for לָיְבַל; Ez 10:18 לָיְבַל for לָיְבַל; Ps 65:2 for לָיְבַל; Num 32:24 but לָיְבַל in Job 6:5; לָיְבַל in Num 32:24 but לָיְבַל in Ps 8:8; לָיְבַל in Deut 23:2 but לָיְבַל 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 לָיְבַל but in Babylon it was לָיְבַל; etc.

88 Gordis, Job, 336.

89 Perhaps in Jer 25:37 לָיְבַל should be לָיְבַל. See also 2 Chr 22:6, where לָיְבַל should be לָיְבַל 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.

cially from disease (thus עי would be a synonym of יום and עיבוון in the following verse);\(^{94}\) (2) the phrase שלח refers to God; (3) the problematic word להון is a conflate of two readings, the archaic לה and the later לה meaning “to him”; (4) להון = להו = לה + הל = לה, because “the letters ו/ן easily interchange”\(^95\) and, שלח, a noun of the stem ששת, meaning “help” (as in the proper names אבישוע “my father is a help” and אלישוע “my God is a help”). 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 شامل 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 (דוד).” Somehow this observation leads him to the conclusion that “at least v. 24b (אמה começ לעד להון) 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 והל in their regular sense, but takes להון = “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 לפדו in 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 שלוח 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-

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\(^{94}\) Grabbe, *Comparative*, 103. Grabbe could not find in other Semitic languages any cognates for the Arabic root عي.

\(^{95}\) Reider, “Etymological,” 129, note 2. However, it is notable that the Ketib-Qere apparatus does not attest to a ו/ן or a ו/נ confusion.

\(^{96}\) Reider, “Etymological,” 129. Reider notes: “Evidently both stems שלח and שלח were used for the concept ‘help.’”

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 re-
minder to “being and not being,” because the Jobian debate apparently took place there. Also,
the proverbial nature of “ashes to ashes” (אפר עפר) 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 אפר עפר, 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. 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 (וני). 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 free-
dom. 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 פִּיד is not used as a verb in the Tanach; only the masculine noun פיר 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
פִּיד has been usually rendered “calamity, ruin, distress, affliction, disaster.” These translations
attempted to provide a parallel to עך “heap, ruin.” However, the similarities of the root פִּיד with
ם פִּי “to die,” i.e., פִּי IV “to destroy” (kindred to פָּרָה, פָּרָה), strongly suggest an escalating
parallelism and the sense “extinction, death” for פִּיד (Gesenius 673a). Indeed, as was already
mentioned, such a perspective was suggested by David Qimchi, Gaab, and Umbreit but was
shunned by modern exegesis. 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 הַנֶּן, and in particular הָנֶן. Is this
the original orthography of the word? Unfortunately, we know very little of the status of final
letters (גיון) 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. 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). 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 intro-
duced rather late in the evolution of the MT, it is permissible to ignore the final letters in the

98 Hakham, אֵיָו, 328, note 103.
99 Mandelkern, Concordantiae, 948d. Mandelkern mentions the connection with Arabic “death.”
100 Tov, Textual Criticism, 167.
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.
A New Attempt to Interpret Job 30:24

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

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. In a densely written text ה was orthographically very similar to ה. It is easy to imagine that a mechanical copyist visually confused between ה and ה as a consequence of the ligature ה = ב, writing לֹ וֹ תְּשׁוּעָה instead of לֹ וֹ תְּשׁוּעָה. When the words in a verse were more clearly separated, the original text should have been לֹ וֹ תְּשׁוּעָה instead MT אֵלֶּה לֹ וֹ תְּשׁוּעָה (“to him”) corresponds perfectly to the 3rd person suffix of בָּשָׂר (“in his calamity”).

The word לֹ וֹ תְּשׁוּעָה could be an abbreviation of לֹ וֹ תְּשׁוּעָה. 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.

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

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 ה in הָּלַּם may have resulted in a scribe’s reading this single letter as ה, and thus copying it as בִּדְמִים. Cf. Aron Pinker, “On Cattle and Cowboys in Kohelet 5,9b,” ZAW 123 (2011): 263–73.

106 Indeed, Ehrlich (Randglossen, 300) felt that “für man hat man ולא תְּשׁוּעָה, but he does not explain how such a reading can be justified orthographically.

107 Naphtali H. Tur-Sinai, תְּשׁוּעָה (Tel Aviv: Yavneh, 1947), 73. Tur-Sinai points, for instance, to Num 23:10, where should be חָלָּם; Deut 32:35, where should be לֹ וֹ תְּשׁוּעָה; Jos 8:9, where should be בָּשָׂר; Jud 1:16, where should be בָּשָׂר; 1 Kgs 9:17, where should be בָּשָׂר; 2 Kgs 6:27, where should be לֹ וֹ תְּשׁוּעָה; Ps 89:51, where should be לֹ וֹ תְּשׁוּעָה; 2 Sam 4:2, where should be לֹ וֹ תְּשׁוּעָה; 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, “קְרֵיסְפָּר רֵאֶשׁ – בהתר/power words יָרְשָׁא,” 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, Analysen 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; ...”
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of הֲ תוֹ (LXX: kτήνην), Prov 30:14 instead of הֲ תֶּ (κατέρ), 2 Sam 13:20 MT יֹצַר (אֲמָרָי), or fully written יֹצַר (אֲמָר), etc. Many cases in which the final ה is missing (or there is an extra final ה) are attested in the Ketib-Qere apparatus. One finds the phrase יֹצַר in Ps 146:3 and יֹצַר in 1 Sam 11:9. The possibility that יֹצַר is an abbreviation of יֹצ֗ר, or that its omission is a scribal error, is well-founded.

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

In v. 24b the meaning “deliverance, salvation” for יֹצַר 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 (풐풐풐) 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, 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, even if man sins, what can he do about it? After all, the One who guards the core of which is that God needs man and therefore has to be tolerant of their shortcomings. Job’s wish for death in 7:15–21, leads him to a powerful theological argument, 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 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 this obstacle, saving trouble both for Himself and man.

For instance, in Prov 8:17 וֹה (Qere) but זָה (Q); Prov 27:10 מִנָּה (Q) but שָׁר (Q); Ruth 1:8 רֶנֶשׁ (K) but שָׁר (Q); Lam 3:10 מִנָּה (K) but שָׁר (Q); Isa 54:16 מִנָּה (Q) but שָׁר (Q); Gen 27:3 כְּ (K) but שָׁר (Q); Jos 7:21 מִנָּה (K) but שָׁר (Q); Jos 24:8 מִנָּה (K) but שָׁר (Q); 2 Sam 21:12 שָׁר (K) but שָׁר (Q); 2 Sam 21:19 מִנָּה (K) but שָׁר (Q); 2 Sam 23:20 מִנָּה (Q) but שָׁר (Q); 1 Kgs 7:23 מִנָּה (K) but שָׁר (Q); Jer 3:5 מִנָּה (K) but שָׁר (Q); Jer 18:30 מִנָּה (Q) but שָׁר (Q); Jer 31:38 מִנָּה (K) but שָׁר (Q); Jer 43:11 מִנָּה (Q) but שָׁר (Q); Jer 15:9 מִנָּה (K) but שָׁר (Q); Jer 48:27 מִנָּה (Q) but שָׁר (Q); Ez 23:14 מִנָּה (Q) but שָׁר (Q); Ez 42:40 מִנָּה (Q) but שָׁר (Q); Mic 3:2 מִנָּה (Q) but שָׁר (Q); Zec 1:17 מִנָּה (K) but שָׁר (Q); Ps 51:5 מִנָּה (Q) but שָׁר (Q); etc.

For instance, already Rashbam claimed that יֹצַר is derived from מִנָּה as תְּשׁוּעָה is from מִנָּה as מִנָּה and מִנָּה from מִנָּה.”

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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).

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 והנה, 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: וָאֵפֶר כֶּעָפָר (v. 19), אֲשַׁוַּע (v. 20), וַיְעָפִר (v. 21), וַיִּפְדֶּה (v. 22), and מָוֶת (v. 23). Job is now not only וָאֵפֶר כֶּעָפָר “like dust and ashes” the העי heap, ruin of v. 24a, but also practically dead as in the proverbial use of “ashes to ashes” (ואפר ואפר). His crying to God (אֲשַׁוַּע) for deliverance goes unanswered (v. 20), and Job finds his deliverance (תְּשׁוּעָה) in death (v. 24b). God’s powerful hand afflicting Job (וַיִּפְדֶּה), has practical limitation—“what can it do against a ruin?” (v. 24a). In v. 22 the author alludes to the “wind” (רוּחַ) 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 (לֹא־בפידו תְּשׁוּעָה). Finally, מָוֶת (v. 23a) clearly associates with פְּדֵי, demonstrating that here פְּדֵי = “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 intrepidness. Job states: “But, not at a ruin would he send his hand, if in his death [is] for him deliverance” (לֹא־בפידו אַךְ־תשועָה). 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 לא אם־בפידו יִישָּלֶח, 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 verdienen 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).

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.”

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 הבת and הנ (as a consequence of the ligature הנ = הבת) the following cogent text is obtained:

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

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.

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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.