

## A New Interpretation of Job 19:26

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## INTRODUCTION

The unit consisting of Job 19:25–28 reads:

וְאֶחָרוֹן עַל־עֵפֶר יָקוּם	וְאֲנִי יִדְעֵתִי גְאֻלִּי חַי	25
וּמִבְּשָׂרֵי אֶחָזָה אֶלֹהִים	וְאַחַר עֲזָרִי נִקְפּוּ־זֹאת	26
וְעֵינַי רָאוּ וְלֹא־זָר	אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי אֶחָזָה־לִּי	27
כָּלוּ כְלִיתִי בְּחֻקֵּי		
וְשָׂרֵשׁ דִּבְרֵי נִמְצָא־בִּי	כִּי תֹאמְרוּ מִה־נִּרְדְּף־לִּי	28

This unit is probably the most famous and obscure in the book of Job. The many different interpretations that have been offered for these verses attest to the challenges that the verses presented to the exegete.<sup>1</sup> E.M. Good, for instance, states:

This passage gives everyone fits, both of furious activity and blank despair. In 35 years of trying to perceive sense in these verses, I have found it only in the first line. I can read each of the words. Except for v. 25a, I cannot with an acceptable degree of confidence construe the words in sensible sentences.<sup>2</sup>

Good's confession of frustration is both poignant and telling.

The interest in vv. 25–27 has been fueled to some degree by the perception that these verses express a belief in future redemption and resurrection. Indeed, this notion might have led to some tempering with the *Urtext*. T.K. Cheyne is confident that “The passage has plainly been edited and re-edited to gratify the very natural longing of a later age for references to the resurrection in body.”<sup>3</sup> Moreover, understanding of the passage has also been thwarted by the uncertainty of what is averred confidently and what represents wishful thinking.

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<sup>1</sup> J. Speer, “Zur Exegese von Hiob 19,25–27,” *ZAW* 25 (1905), 47–140.

<sup>2</sup> E.M. Good, *In Turns of Tempest: A Reading of Job with a Translation* (Stanford: Stanford University, 1990), 100.

<sup>3</sup> T.K. Cheyne “On Some Suspected Passages in the Poetical Books of the Old Testament,” *JQR* 10 (1897), 13–17 (16).

D.J.A. Clines characterized vv. 25–28 as expressing Job’s conviction and desires. He says, “Basic to the interpretation . . . of these celebrated and much debated verses is a distinction between what Job knows or believes and what he desires.”<sup>4</sup>

Among vv. 25–28, at least in an initial reading, stands out the enigmatic v. 26. D.B. Duhm mentions in this regard, “Bekanntlich ist v. 26 eine crux interpretum und unendlich verschieden von den Exegeten behandelt.”<sup>5</sup> Understanding of this verse presented considerable difficulties to the ancient versions, and generations of exegetes that followed. E. Dhorme says, “Much ink has been spilt over this verse. A glance at the versions shows that the difficulties did not arise yesterday, and Knabenbauer is right in saying: *versiculus brevis, septens constans voculis, at undequaque difficultatibus septus.*”<sup>6</sup> S.R. Driver and G.B. Gray characterize v. 26 as being “uncertain, ambiguous and difficult—especially the words **נִקְפוּ-זֹאת**, which, however taken, seem so improbable that textual corruption at this point at least is almost certain.”<sup>7</sup> Their discussion of this verse runs for four pages; an inordinate amount of space in their *Philological Notes*. Still, v. 26a is left un-translated in Volume I.<sup>8</sup>

While each of the words in the verse is well attested in the Tanakh, and their meaning quite certain, the sense of the verse as a whole is not obvious. Is the verse a statement of knowledge? Does the verse express a desire? Is it a mystic vision? Does it refer to Job’s flesh and skin while alive, or to an awakening after death? What is the importance of seeing God and its ramifications? How should one understand **נִקְפוּ-זֹאת**?

It has been noted that in v. 26, neither the temporal sense of the word **וְאַחֵר** (“after, afterwards”) nor its spatial sense (“behind, following”), fits the following **עוֹרִי** (“my skin”).<sup>9</sup> The root of **נִקְפוּ** could be **נִקַּף** I (“strike off”) or **נִקַּף** II (“go around”). However, the phrase formed by **נִקַּף** I and **זֹאת** is awkward in context, and the intransitive **נִקַּף** II obviously does not fit the demonstrative pronoun **זֹאת**. Moreover, the word **מִבְּשָׁרִי** seemed ambiguous. Some understood it as describing a state when Job has still flesh (“from my flesh”), others understood it as referring to his post-death state, when he does not have any flesh (“without my flesh”). This distinction led to

<sup>4</sup> D.J.A. Clines, *Job 1–20* (WBC 17; Dallas: Word Books, 1989), 457. See also Id., “Belief, Desire and Wish in Job 19:23–27: Clues for the Identity of Job’s ‘Redeemer,’ ” in M. Augustin (ed.), *Wünschet Jerusalem Frieden; Collected Communication to the XIIth Congress of the International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament* (New York: Verlag Peter Lang, 1988), 363–70 (366–70).

<sup>5</sup> D.B. Duhm, *Das Buch Hiob erklärt* (KHC; Tübingen: Mohr, 1897), 102.

<sup>6</sup> E. Dhorme, *A Commentary of the Book of Job* (London: Nelson, 1967), 284.

<sup>7</sup> S.R. Driver and G.B. Gray, *A Critical Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Job*, (2 vols.; ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1921), 2:128–32.

<sup>8</sup> Driver and Gray, *Commentary on the Book of Job*, 1:174.

<sup>9</sup> In the Tanakh, **אָחֵר** is always local when it refers to an *object*, and temporal only when it refers to an *action*.

important theological conclusions regarding after-life. Finally, the phrase אֶחְזֶה אֱלֹהִים (“I shall behold Eloah”) is troublesome, because it is not clear how Job expects this to happen and the beholding of Eloah is not followed by any consequences.

No wonder that the thematic and textual difficulties of v. 26 convinced commentators that the verse is corrupt. Dhorme notes that “Moderns have not scrupled to correct the text, for it seems indeed that the 1st hemistich is hardly susceptible of a grammatical interpretation, whatever meaning is adopted for וְנִקְפוּ.”<sup>10</sup> Moreover, some commentators found it necessary to rearrange the words in the verse, or the order of the verses. In M.H. Pope’s opinion “Various emendations have been proposed, but are scarcely worth discussing.”<sup>11</sup>

This article proposes reading v. 26 (sans אֶחְזֶה אֱלֹהִים) as the continuation of v. 25. It expresses Job’s conviction that God would eventually vindicate him and would heal his skin and flesh. From this perspective, vv. 25–28 could be paraphrased: “Job is certain that God exists and would eventually manifest himself on earth. He knows also, that this God would heal his wounds and attach his skin to the flesh. This is the God that he holds on to and *his* eyes will see. His innards pine in his bosom to hear his friends say: ‘Why do we persecute him? What evidence was found about him?’”

It will be shown that this perspective can be obtained with minor emendations of the MT and that it thematically fits the gist of Job’s reply and attitude.

### ANALYSIS

Commentators usually consider v. 26 in the context of the preceding and following verses. With regard to vv. 25–27, they focus on the following questions: a) who is the “redeemer” (גֹּאֲלִי); b) what is the redeemer’s function; and, c) when, during Job’s existence, would the redeemer assume his role? Within this framework of concerns, most of the interpretations of v. 26 essentially fall into three categories. These are distinguished by the perception that Job encounters God being *dead*, *alive*, or *resurrected*. On these fundamental distinctions is superimposed a wide range of exegetical nuances. Indeed, the extensive exegetical literature on v. 26 shows that numerous interpretative approaches have been suggested, which introduced significant differences of meaning. Consequently, the following discussion should be considered a bare summary.<sup>12</sup>

### THE VERSIONS

The ancient translations have obviously been baffled by v. 26. This is clear from the incoherent translation of the LXX, the

<sup>10</sup> Dhorme, *Commentary*, 284.

<sup>11</sup> M.H. Pope, *Job* (AB 15; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1986), 147.

<sup>12</sup> Speer, “Zur Exegese von Hiob 19,25–27,” 47–140. Speer’s overview of the exegesis on vv. 25–27 is more than 90 pages long.

incomplete rendition of the Peshitta, the paraphrase of the Targum, and the theological allusions of the Vulgate.

The LXX attaches three words of the preceding v. 25 and reads, “to rise up upon the earth my skin that endures these: for these things have been accomplished to me of the Lord” (ἐπὶ γῆς ἀναστῆσαι τὸ δέρμα μου τὸ ἀναντλοῦν ταῦτα παρὰ γὰρ Κυρίου τατά μοι συνετελέσθη).<sup>13</sup> This reading a) attaches עפר יקום to the beginning of v. 26; b) omits ואחר; c) reads ומשדי instead of ומבשרי; d) reads אלה instead of אלוה; and, e) it is not clear whether it read נקפו or אחזה, and if it did not read these words what it read instead. The LXX’s emendations do not result in a cogent translation. Consequently, it is doubtful that it had a text which differed from MT.

Peshitta translates v. 26, “Although devouring worms have covered my skin and my flesh.”<sup>14</sup> This reading a) relegates אלוה אחזה to the following verse; b) takes אחר = “although”; c) apparently understands נקפו as being derived from נקה II (“go around”); d) assumes זאת = “devouring worms”; and, e) adds details that are not available in MT. The emendation results in an incomplete verse.<sup>15</sup>

Targum has for v. 26, “and after my skin has swollen, that will come to pass, and from my flesh I will see again God” (בתר דאתפח משכי תהי דא ומבסרי אחמי תוב אלהא). This reading a) assumes that נקפו = “that will be” (תהי דא); b) takes זאת = “swollen” (דאתפח); and, adds “again” (תוב). The meanings assigned to נקפו and זאת are not attested in the Tanakh or Hebrew language. It is not clear why swelling of Job’s skin will make him see God again, since nothing so far stated that he has seen God.

Vulgate renders v. 26, “And I shall be clothed again with my skin, and in my flesh I will see my God” (*et rursus circumdabor pelle mea et in carne mea videbo deum meum*). This reading a) takes ואחר = “and again” (*et rursus*); b) apparently understands נקפו as being derived from נקה II (“go around”) in the sense of “surround with flesh”; c) takes “in my flesh” in the sense of “bodily form”; and, d) adds “my” (*meum*). The plural of נקפו is, however, problematic. Driver and Gray note that “Hontheim has recently defended this interpretation; but he can account for the plural only by the very forced suggestion that its subject is זאת used collectively of the bones of the body with the sense of *I*—at the last day I shall be (prophetic perfect) surrounded with my skin!”<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup> L.C.L. Brenton, *The Septuagint with Apocrypha: Greek and English* (1st ed. 1851; Peabody: Hendrickson, 1987), 679. The Alexandrian version has “body” (σῶμα) instead of “skin.”

<sup>14</sup> G.M. Lamsa, *Holy Bible: From the Ancient Eastern Text* (San Francisco, Calif.: Harper & Row, 1985), 571.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. KJV. Peshitta considers v. 27 as the complement of v. 26. It reads v. 27 as follows: “Yet, if my eyes shall see God, then my heart also will see the light; but now my body is consumed.” It is impossible to reconcile this translation with MT. Moreover, by itself it makes no sense.

<sup>16</sup> Driver and Gray, *Job II*, 130.

**LATER EXEGESIS**

Dhorme felt that most of the translations of v. 26 can be reduced in the final analysis to just two. These are “that from the skeleton covered with its skin, that from my flesh, I shall see God” and “when this skin will have fallen into shreds, divested of my flesh, I shall see God.”<sup>17</sup> In what follows, I present an overview of these two views, and for completeness sake, I include also attempts to view the verse as indication for resurrection.

1. *Resurrection view: The verse expresses the conviction that Job will be resurrected in flesh, and will receive his vindication from God.* This view has few modern followers. It has been recognized that were the notion of resurrection available to the author it would have obviated the entire theme of the book of Job. E.J. Kissane says: “If Job believed in the resurrection and the possibility of reward after death, he would have had an adequate solution of the problem of suffering, and the whole discussion would have been futile.”<sup>18</sup> Similarly, G. Fohrer observes:

Dennoch ist die Deutung auf eine Rechtfertigung Hiobs nach seiner Auferstehung unhaltbar . . . Hiob erwartet kein neues Glück mehr (7,6f.; 9,25; 13,15; 17,15f.). Wer in die Unterwelt, das Land ohne Wiederkehr (10,21), eingegangen ist, kommt niemals zurück (7,9f.). Der kurzlebige Mensch ist für den Tod bestimmt, aus dem er nicht zurückkehrt (14). Die Hoffnung auf neues Glück steigt nicht mit hinab zur Unterwelt (17,16). Darum sucht Hiob das Eingreifen Gottes als Rächer jetzt bald herbeizuführen, weil es sonst zu spät ist (16,18–22). Ebenso wenig findet sich in den folgenden Hiobreden irgendein Hinweis auf eine Auferstehungshoffnung, wie es zu erwarten wäre, wenn Hiob sich in V. 25–27 zu ihr durchgerungen hatte.<sup>19</sup>

Moreover, it is also difficult to anchor this view in the MT. For instance, Luther translated v. 26, “und werde darnach mit dieser meiner Haut umgeben werden und in meinem Fleisch Gott sehen.” There is no way that **וְאַחַר עוֹרִי נִקְפְּרִיזָאת** could possibly mean “und werde darnach mit meiner Haut umgeben werden.” Moreover, “in meinem Fleisch Gott sehen” is not a complete sentence.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Dhorme, *Job*, 284. Note that these translations delete **נִקְפְּרִיזָאת**.

<sup>18</sup> E.J. Kissane, *The Book of Job* (Dublin: Browne & Nolan, 1939), 120.

<sup>19</sup> G. Fohrer, *Das Buch Hiob* (KAT 16; Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1963), 318.

<sup>20</sup> The translation of vv. 25–27 offered by Luther is, “Aber ich weiß, daß mein Erlöser lebet; und er wird mich hernach aus der Erde auferwecken und werde darnach mit meiner Haut umgeben werden und in meinem Fleisch Gott sehen. Denselben werde ich mir sehen und meine Augen werden ihn schauen und kein Fremder. Meine Nieren sind verzehrt in meinem Schoß” (*Die Bibel: Martin Luther Translation*. Cited 7/21/14. Online: <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/>

This fundamental perspective is adopted by Vulgate, Clemens Romanus, Origen, Jerome, Augustin, Luther, Knabenbauer, Hontheim, Royer, Michaelis (both), Shultens, Hier, and more recently Ceuppens, Young, Schilling, Prado, Logan, Andersen, etc.

The resurrection view persisted in both the Catholic and Evangelical churches till the seventeenth century, where it was included in the *Formula concordiae*, catechisms, and church songs.<sup>21</sup> M. Witte noted recently, “As for Job 19,25–26, an explicitly theological interpretation of resurrection can be found solely among Christian writers in late antiquity. This gives rise to the conclusion that it is a Christian gloss.”<sup>22</sup>

2. *Ante mortem view*: *The verse expresses the conviction that Job will see God while he is still alive.* This view is based on the belief that hope for personal resurrection is not evident in at least the rest of the book, and that despite Job’s death-wishes he still expects to be vindicated in his life. It seems to echo what actually happens in the book, and suggests restoration of Job’s relation with God. Kissane observes

It is very difficult to reconcile this view with the view attributed to Job in the rest of the book. In the early speeches he was still hopeful of a respite from suffering before death; but in his recent speeches, nothing stands out so prominently as the hopelessness of his case . . . Job’s wish that his words were written on a scroll or engraved on a rock has no meaning if he expected to be alive for his vindication.<sup>23</sup>

Fohrer remarks on the ante mortem view

Daher hat man häufig angenommen, daß Hiob das Eingreifen Gottes noch zu Lebzeiten erwarte. Aber in welcher Weise und mit welchem Ziel erwartet er es? Man hat im Text die Hoffnung ausgesprochen gefunden, daß Gott den Hiob auf Erden wieder gesund machen und von neuem beglücken werde. Doch gerade diese Hoffnung hat Hiob längst aufgegeben (7,6; 9,25; 17,15f.; 30,23).<sup>24</sup>

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[cgi/1/luther/luther-idx?type=citation&book=DAS+BUCH+HIOB+%28JOB%29&chapno=19&startverse=25&endverse=27](http://luther.luther-idx?type=citation&book=DAS+BUCH+HIOB+%28JOB%29&chapno=19&startverse=25&endverse=27)).

<sup>21</sup> Speer, “Zur Exegese von Hiob 19,25–27,” 47f; N. Peters, *Das Buch Job übersetzt und erklärt* (EHAT 21; Münster: Aschendorf, 1928), 202–3.

<sup>22</sup> M. Witte, “The Greek Book of Job,” in T. Krüger *et al.* (eds.), *Das Buch Hiob und seine Interpretationen. Beiträge zum Hiob-Symposium auf dem Monte Verità vom 14.–19. August 2005* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 2007), 33–54 (44). Cf. Peters, *Job*, 502 n. 43. Speer (“Zur Exegese von Hiob 19,25–27,” 49) notes that “Die kirchliche Auslegung fand in unserer Stelle einen locus classicus für die christliche Lehre von der Auferstehung und einen Beweis für die Gottheit Christi.”

<sup>23</sup> Kissane, *Job*, 120.

<sup>24</sup> Fohrer, *Hiob*, 320. Cf. also C.J. Lindblom, “‘Ich weiß, daß mein Erlöser lebt.’ Zum Verständnis der Stelle Hi 19,25–27,” *Studia Theo-*

Moreover, it is also difficult to anchor this view in the MT. For instance, Dhorme renders v. 26, “And that, behind my skin, I shall stand up, and from my flesh I shall see Eloah.”<sup>25</sup> This translation assumes that *נקפּוֹזאת* is a corruption of *נִקְפָּתִי*, the *Niphal* form of *זקף* “to be erect, raise up.” However, the root *זקף* occurs only twice in the Tanakh (Ps 145:14 and 146:8), never in the *Niphal*, and always as the opposite of *כּפּוּ* (“to be bent, bend down”). The verb *נִקְפָּתִי* does not convey the same notion as “I shall stand up” (*אֶקוּם*). Furthermore, the translation assumes that there is some significance to “behind my skin.” However, the image of standing behind one’s skin makes little sense. Finally, the relevance of Job’s “stand[ing] up” is not clear.

This fundamental perspective is adopted by Rashi, Ibn Ezra, Ramban, Ralbag, Chrysostom, Eichhorn, Justi, Köstlin, Hirzel, Heiligstedt, Hitzig, Stickel, Budde, Kautzsch, Hahn, Le Hir, Crampon, Devine, Ball, Brunston, Lindblom, Delitzsch, Dhorme, Peters, Rongy, Spadafora, Tur-Sinai, Chaham, Sutcliffe, Meek, Gordis, Whybray, Habel, Hartley, Clines, etc.<sup>26</sup>

3. *Post mortem view*: The verse expresses the conviction that Job will see God after his death. This perspective, held by many modern commentators, assumes that Job would be, after death, still able to sense God and appreciate this event.<sup>27</sup> However, after his death Job cannot expect personal reconstitution as a man, since this notion started to filter into Judaism only at the end of the

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*logica* 2 (1940), 65–77.

<sup>25</sup> Dhorme, *Job*, 284–85. Dhorme understands *מבשרי* as being “through my flesh.” However, seeing “through my flesh” is a physiologically strange notion; rather *unlike* the beloved gazing through the window (Song 2:9)

<sup>26</sup> A. Erickson, “‘Without My Flesh I Will See God’: Job’s Rhetoric of the Body,” *JBL* 132/2 (2013), 295–313. Erickson comments in this regard: “Many interpreters who translate ‘in my flesh’ do so because they assert that ‘without flesh’ does not make sense in the context. However, many such arguments are based on an overly literal interpretation of Job’s words. They do not explore the metaphorical aspects of the expression” (*ibid.*, 308) In Erickson’s view Job’s words in v. 26 allude to “an ironic fantasy that entails escaping the testimony he wears constantly: his flesh (as opposed to a robe of righteousness and a cloak of justice as in Job 29:14)” (*ibid.*, 310).

<sup>27</sup> H.H. Rowley (*Job* [Century Bible; Melbourne: Nelson, 1970], 174) states the following:

In 14.21f. Job had spoken of the ignorance of the dead of all that transpires on earth. Here he is borne by the inner logic of his faith in God, despite the suffering he believes to come from the hand of God, to look for a break in that ignorance, and the immense relief of knowing that his innocence has been vindicated. Though there is no full grasping of a belief in a worthwhile Afterlife with God, this passage is a notable landmark in the progress toward such a belief. Support for the *ante mortem view* is Job 23:30–31, which is relatively late (100 BCE). One may well wonder why this notion would occur only in the much older Job. The belief of feeling after death, in particular that a person can still sense the pain of his deteriorating flesh and can mourn his fate, occurs in *bBerachot* 18b.

biblical period.<sup>28</sup> The particulars of such possibility are at best nebulous, since no allusion to it occurs in the Tanakh. Rowley states in this regard:

Two things seem to be clear. Job is assured that his Vindicator will arise to vindicate his innocence, and that he himself will see God. If, as seems probable, the Vindicator is God, this means that he will be aware of his vindication. That this vindication is not expected until after Job's death is likely, since he has cried for his blood to demand satisfaction. But in what form Job will be conscious of vindication must remain obscure.<sup>29</sup>

However, it is not only the form but the consciousness that is at doubt. It is very difficult to reconcile this view with the notion of Sheol in this book and other books of the Tanakh.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, Job says explicitly that after he dies God would not be able to find him anymore (7:21).<sup>31</sup>

Furthermore, it is also difficult to anchor this view in the MT. For instance, Pope understands v. 26 as saying: "Even after my skin is flayed, without my flesh I shall see God."<sup>32</sup> He adds "even"; takes נקפו = "is flayed," though Job was not flayed alive or was expecting to be flayed; does not account for the plural of נקפו; omits זאת; and understands מבשרי as "away from my flesh" (i.e., without my flesh). In Speer's view "Überall wohin man sich wende, verstoße die Unsterblichkeitslehre gegen die Ökonomie der Schrift und bringe Widerspruch und Zerstörung in sie."<sup>33</sup>

This fundamental perspective is adopted by Welte, Schlottmann, Ewald, Dillman, Wellhausen, Duhm, Renan, Hitzig, Segond, Smend, Driver and Gray, Steuernagel, Koenig, Peake, Kraeling, Hölscher, Oesterley and Robinson, Kaminka, Barton, Fohrer, Pope, Rowley, Davidson, Strauß, Weiser, Horst, Erickson, etc.

4. *Emendations.* Driver and Gray observe, "The uncertainties and difficulties of MT in this verse being so great, it is not surprising that attempts at emendation have been numerous and ingenious, if not convincing."<sup>34</sup>

a. *Emended Readings*, for instance:

Cheyne emends v. 26 in order to produce the following reading: עֲדֵי יִפֶּק תְּאַוְתִּי וּמִשְׁרָרִי יֵאָחֶזֶה אֱלֹהִים ("My Witness will bring to pass my desires, and a curse will take hold of my foes").<sup>35</sup>

<sup>28</sup> F.I. Andersen, *Job: An Introduction and Commentary* (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1976), 194.

<sup>29</sup> Rowley, *Job*, 174.

<sup>30</sup> A. Pinker, "Sheol," *JBQ* 23/3 (1995), 168–79.

<sup>31</sup> A. Pinker, "Job's Perspectives on Death," *JBQ* 35/2 (2007) 73–84.

<sup>32</sup> Pope, *Job*, 139.

<sup>33</sup> Speer, "Zur Exegese von Hiob 19,25–27," 60.

<sup>34</sup> Driver and Gray, *Job II*, 130.

<sup>35</sup> Cheyne, "Suspected Passages," 15–16.

C. Siegfried reads, **לְחַיּוֹת עוֹרִי מִכְּלָל זֹאת וּמֵאֵלֹהִים נַעֲשׂוּ לִי אֵלֶּה** (“and to revive my skin, which this, namely the leprosy, must endure, and from God was all this done to me”).<sup>36</sup>

G. Bickell proposed two emended readings: **וְאַחַר עֵדֵי נִקְפָּה אֵלֶּה** (“and after my witness marks this and from God I see these”), and **יִקָּם עֵדֵי נִקְמַת זֹאת וּמִשְׁרֵי אֵלֶּה** (“My witness [i.e., God] will take vengeance for this, but a curse would seize my adversaries”).<sup>37</sup> etc.

Duhm suggests for v. 26a the emendation: **וַיִּקּוּם אַחַר עֵדֵי זֶה אֶתְּךָ** and the translation “Und aufstehen wird ein anderer als mein Zeuge. Und aufrichten wird der sein Zeichen.”<sup>38</sup> He attaches v. 26b to the following verse.

Typically, the emended readings present in awkward Hebrew notions that are harder to envision than those in MT. Driver and Gray observe, “but if the textual evidence is to be so largely disregarded, it would be easy to construct distichs in more exact parallelism,” and it can be added, better Hebrew.<sup>39</sup>

b. Emendation of particular words:

**אֶחָד**—omit (LXX), **אַחַר** (Duhm), **אֶחָד** “I shall see” (Beer, Ball).

**עוֹרִי**—**רוּעִי** “mine adversaries” (Kennicott), **עֵדֵי** (Bickell, Beer, Duhm, Gaster), **בְּעוֹדֵי** (Ball), **שְׂדֵי** (Cheyne), **עֲרֵבְנֵי** (Richter), **עוֹרִי** (Terrien).

**נִקְפָּה**—**נִקְמַת** (Bickell), **יָבֵן** (Cheyne), **נִקְרָה** (Beer, Gaster), **יִזְקֶה** (Richter).

**זֹאת**—**תְּזִיחָה** (Cheyne), **אֶתִּי** (Beer, Gaster), **אֶתִּי** (Richter), **כְּזֹאת** (Budde, Fohrer, Sicre Diaz, Rowley), **זֹאת תְּהִיָּה** (Targum, Stickel).

**נִשְׁקַפְתִּי**—**נִקְרָה כְּזֹאת** (Budde, Hölscher, Fohrer), **נִשְׁקַפְתִּי** (Beer), **נִקְפְּזִי** (Beer), **זֶה אֶתְּךָ** (Duhm), **נִקְרָה רְאִיתוֹ** (Kissane), **נִקְמֹת אֶל** (Ball), **זֶה אֶתְּךָ** (Larcher, Terrien) **נִקְפְּזִי** (Dhorme).<sup>40</sup>

<sup>36</sup> C. Siegfried, *The Book of Job: Critical edition of the Hebrew Text* (SBOT; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1893), *ad loc.* Cf. Speer, “Zur Exegese von Hiob 19,25–27,” 137.

<sup>37</sup> G. Bickell, *Das Buch Job Nach Anleitung der Strophik und der Septuaginta* (Vienna: Karl Gerold, 1894), *ad loc.* Cf. Driver and Gray, *Job II*, 131.

<sup>38</sup> Duhm (*Hiob*, 103) explains, “Das Zeichen, das der Bluträcher aufrichtete, kennen wir nicht, aber es ist selbstverständlich, dass der Bluträcher an der Leiche des getöteten Mörders ein Zeichen hinterlassen musste, ähnlich wie es die Vollstrecker der Vehme thaten, um die Tötung von einem gemeinen Mord zu unterscheiden.”

<sup>39</sup> Driver and Gray, *Job II*, 132.

<sup>40</sup> Fohrer (*Hiob*, 308) notes, “Es ist **נִקְרָה כְּזֹאת** (Niph'al, Budde) statt Piel mit dem unpassendem Sinn ‘abhauen’ zu lesen; Verb nur noch Jes 10,34.” Why would one read so if it is *unpassend*? Byington, relying on the LXX (**נִטַּל**), suggested for **נִקְרָה** the meaning “suffer, bear.” Cf. S.T. Byington, “Hebrew Marginalia,” *JBL* 60 (1941), 279–88. Gaster derives the meaning of **נִקְרָה** from the Akkadian *zaqāqu* “defend a claim.” Cf. T.H. Gaster, “Old Testament Notes,” *V/T* 4/1 (1954), 73–79 (78).

מבשרי—משדי (LXX, Merx, Bickell), מְשָׁרִי (Bickell), מְשִׁהָדִי (Beer), שְׁהָדִי (Richter), מְבַשְׁרִי “my refuter, Freudenboten” (G.R. Driver, Procksch, Schmidt), מְבַשֵּׁר (Dahood).

אחזה—אחזה (Bickell).

אלוה—אלה (LXX, Merx, Ehrlich), אֱלֹהִים (Bickell).<sup>41</sup>

Many of these emendations are orthographically unlikely and result in linguistically awkward texts.

##### 5. *Unique interpretations.*

I. B. Kennicott translates v. 26: “And after that my adversaries have mangled me thus, even in my flesh shall I see God.”<sup>42</sup> He takes אַחַר = “after,” עוֹרִי = “mine adversaries,” נִקְפוּ זֹאת = “have mangled me thus,” and וּמִבְּשָׁרִי = “even in my flesh.” However, the book states that Job was afflicted only by Satan. Moreover, Job could not have possibly construed his disease coming from a number of sources representing various adversaries. More likely Job’s disease suggested to Job and ancient readers that he is being punished for sins committed.

II. N.H. Tur-Sinai: Tur-Sinai renders v. 26: “After my body let them break it up! Out of my flesh I want to see (my) God.” He believes that נִקְפוּ זֹאת refers to the inscription in stone (vv. 23–24),<sup>43</sup> and Job asks in v. 26a that it be smashed upon his death, and that in his lifetime he would see God.<sup>44</sup> Note that “after my body” is not a complete thought, and it is disconnected from the rest of the verse. Moreover, Driver and Gray mention Budde’s observation that

[W]hereas בָּשָׂר by itself is often used for the entire body as contrasted with the נֶפֶשׁ or לֵב (e.g. 14<sup>22</sup>, Ps. 16<sup>9</sup> 63<sup>2</sup>), עוֹר is not, but is used strictly of the outside covering of the body, the skin (30<sup>30</sup>, La. 4<sup>8</sup> 5<sup>10</sup>, Jer. 13<sup>23</sup>), and combined with בָּשָׂר requires the latter to be used in its specific sense of the flesh under the skin (75).<sup>45</sup>

III. Kissane has for v. 26, “And after my skin is stripped off, did I but see Him, without my flesh were I to behold God.” He considers v. 26 a conditional clause; such sentences, without a conditional particle occur in the book of Job and elsewhere (5:24; 19:18; 23:10). Kissane says that Job “does not assert that he will see God, but that if he were to see God, he

<sup>41</sup> Kennicott MS 311 has וְאַחֲרֵי; MS 200 omits עוֹרִי; MS 48 omits אַחֲזָה אֱלֹהִים.

<sup>42</sup> B. Kennicott, *Remarks on Select Passages in the Old Testament: To Which Are Added Eight Sermons* (Oxford: Prince and Cooke, 1787), 222.

<sup>43</sup> A. Chaham, *Sepher Job* (Jerusalem: Mossad HaRav Kook, 1981), 150. Chaham also takes נִקְפוּ זֹאת as referring to the carving of his words. He explains that v. 26 expresses a change in Job’s desire: he wants his words to be carved in the flesh under his skin, rather than in stone. The practicality of this request is questionable.

<sup>44</sup> N.H. Tur-Sinai, *The Book of Job* (revised edition; Jerusalem: Kiryath Sepher, 1967), 306. Tur-Sinai’s contention (*ibid.*, 302) that vv. 23–24 are challenging questions does not fit the tenor of Job’s argument and is contextually doubtful.

<sup>45</sup> Driver and Gray, *Job II*, 129.

would see Him as friendly and no longer hostile.”<sup>46</sup> However, the conditional does not resolve the problems with v. 26. One may well ask why seeing God resolves Job’s complaint. Indeed, Job eventually sees God, still most commentators agree that he obtained no answer. Moreover, why would seeing God change his attitude toward God from hostile to friendly?<sup>47</sup>

Kissane’s interpretation is obtained by a) taking אחר = “after”; b) emending נקפו זאת to נקף ראתו; c) linking v. 26 to v. 27; and understanding “from my flesh” = “without my flesh,” as a “disembodied spirit.” His emendation consists of a revocalization, rearrangement of letters, and assumption of ו/ר and ו/ז confusions.<sup>48</sup> The notion of a human becoming a “disembodied spirit” capable of seeing and feeling “friendliness” or “hostility” is inconceivable. In Kissane’s own words “Such a thought would have been impossible to the writer considering his idea of Sheol.”<sup>49</sup>

IV. A. Kaminka paraphrases vv. 25–27, “After my suffering has already annihilated my skin and flesh, after my flesh is gone, when a redeemer of my righteousness and a recognizer of my innocence would arise, I will see God agree with him, as I see it now but no one else, and my innards waste from loneliness (in my bosom) because there is no empathy.”<sup>50</sup> This poignant paraphrase cannot be anchored in the MT.

V. Stier translates v. 26, “Und dann mein Helfer sich aufrichtet, meinen Zeugen shau ich: Gott.”<sup>51</sup> He takes אחר = dann, עורי = mein Helfer, נקפו זאת = sich aufrichtet, and ומבשרי = meinen Zeugen. However, it is difficult to comprehend, without elaborate additional explanation, why seeing God would be equivalent to seeing “meinen Zeugen.” Indeed, Job insists that there could be no “Zeugen” (witness).

VI. N.C. Habel translates v. 26, “After, that is, my skin is peeled off! But from my flesh I will behold Eloah.” He splits v. 26 into two parts, and attaches v. 26a to v. 25 and v. 26b to v. 27. Habel comments:

It seems best, especially in view of the literary design, to link v. 26a with the preceding verse and simply recognize that Job believes his defender will rise at the end to plead his cause even though his skin has peeled off in death.

<sup>46</sup> Kissane, *Job*, 114 and 121. Kissane finds support for taking v. 26 as a conditional clause Peshitta’s “If my eyes were to see God, they would see light.”

<sup>47</sup> C. Bruston, “Pour l’exégèse de Job 19,25–29,” *ZAW* 26 (1906), 143–47. Bruston suggests that Job sees in a vision what God would do after his death. God would intervene only after Job’s skin has been battered (26a). Still, in his flesh and while alive he would see this intervention. This view seems to be too artificial.

<sup>48</sup> The ו/ר confusion is attested, e.g., in 1 Sam 14:47 where we find ירשיע instead of יושיע. Neither of the two confusions is attested in the *Ketib-Qere* apparatus.

<sup>49</sup> Kissane, *Job*, 120.

<sup>50</sup> A. Kaminka, *Peirush Hegioni le-Sepher Job* (Tel Aviv: Yavneh, 1949), 37.

<sup>51</sup> F. Stier, *Das Buch Ijob* (München: Kösel Verlag, 1954), 96.

Thus the two terms **אחרון** ‘at the last’ (v. 25b), and the related preposition **אחר**, ‘after’ (v. 26a), complement each other and point to a time ‘after’ death when Job’s vindication happens (cf. 14:13).<sup>52</sup>

Habel’s translation implies that: a) he reads **אחר זאת**; b) he takes **זאת** to mean “that is”; c) he does not account for the plural **נקפו**; and, d) does not explain the consequent triple repetition of seeing God.

About five decades ago, H.H. Rowley said about vv. 25–27, “In fact this is one of the most cryptic passages in the book, and both text and interpretation are far from sure.”<sup>53</sup> Most commentators would concur with this statement even today. In the following section a new interpretation of v. 26 is suggested, which exploits some likely scribal omissions for obtaining a coherent sense of this verse.

### PROPOSED SOLUTION

The approach that is adopted in this study for understanding the difficult v. 26 rests on an appreciation of Job’s immediate and concrete source of suffering—the *grievous sores from the sole of his foot unto the crown of his head* (2:7) and the blackened peeling skin (30:30). While identification of Job’s affliction is disputed, it is obvious from the text that Job’s body was covered with sores, the sores were visible to others, and that Job was in pain (2:13).<sup>54</sup> In terms of disability studies, Job is afflicted with a disease (**שחין רע**), he is impaired (**חרש להתגרד**), and he is disabled (**ישב בתוך האפר**).<sup>55</sup> L.J.M. Classen says:

We see, for instance, harrowing self-descriptions of his diseased and disabled body (30:16–19), as well as the social and physical isolation Job is experiencing due to his disability (30:1–15). One text, Job 19:13–20, is representative of Job’s anguish. In this description, something of the

<sup>52</sup> N.C. Habel, *The Book of Job: A Commentary* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Westminster Press, 1985), 293.

<sup>53</sup> H.H. Rowley, “The Book of Job and Its Meaning,” *BJRL* 41 (1958), 162–207 (203).

<sup>54</sup> For a synopsis of specific identifications of the **שחין רע** see Rowley, “The Book of Job and Its Meaning,” 169–70 nn. 3–4.

<sup>55</sup> R. Raphael, “Things Too Wonderful: A Disabled Reading of Job,” *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 31/4 (2004), 399–424. Raphael explains (399–400) that “disability studies focus on the disabled body in its manifold locations in time and space: the history of disability, the metaphysics or theologies that attempt to place deviant bodies in a cosmic order, the social construction of disability by the able-bodied, and the lived experience of people with disabilities.” S. Olyan (*Disability in the Hebrew Bible: Interpreting Mental and Physical Differences* [New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008], 3) defines human “disability” in the Tanakh as being “a physical or mental condition or state impacting negatively on affected categories of persons especially on account of the social meaning and significance attributed to the condition or state in the biblical context.”

dehumanisation and rejection that people living with disability may experience is evident.<sup>56</sup>

From Job's perspective, his physical affliction caused him constant suffering; he refers to his intense physical and emotional pain repeatedly in his speeches (e.g., 1:20a; 2:8, 13, 3:24; 6:2–4, 10; 7:20b; 9:17, 28a; 11:16a; 16:6a, 9b–c, 12–16a, 20a; 17:7a; 19:10–12, 22; 23:2; 30:16b, 18, 27b, 30–31). It also continually manifested to him and any observer his obvious guilt. Thus, while he might have wanted to be considered and related to on a human level (i.e., that being human entails having diseases), he was acutely aware of the theological perspective.<sup>57</sup>

In antiquity, the causes for diseases of individuals were assumed to be personal sin, invasion of demons and evil spirits, witchcraft, inadequate diet and regime, or some combination of these.<sup>58</sup> Usually illness was perceived as a punitive instrument for transgressions against or breached promises to one of the divinities.<sup>59</sup> This attitude is also reflected in the Tanakh. Like their ancient Near Eastern neighbors, the authors of the Tanakh believed that physical and mental disabilities most often resulted from divine agency.<sup>60</sup> For instance, non-obs-

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<sup>56</sup> L.J.M. Classens, "Job, Theology and Disability: Moving Towards a New Kind of Speech," in L.J.M. Classens, L. Swartz and L. Hansen (eds.), *Searching for Dignity: Conversations on Human Dignity, Theology, and Disability* (Stellenbosch: SUN MeDIA, 2013), 55–66. Classens sees in Job's sharing his experiences an *attempt to challenge the efforts of his friends to "define Job and his experience of disability"* (57–58, emphasis added). Olyan (*Disability*, 31–35) notes that in the Tanakh, "lasting social restrictions are placed on those with skin diseases."

<sup>57</sup> F.R. Magdalene, "The ANE Legal Origins of Impairment as Theological Disability and the Book of Job," *Perspectives in Religious Studies*, 34 (2007), 22–59. Magdalene notes that, "Not all ancient Near Eastern religious materials understood disability, disease, and disaster as arising out of human sin. Suffering and physical difference are more complicated than that in the region . . . Nonetheless, an important line of this thinking exists in Mesopotamian religious texts of great antiquity" (ibid., 26 n. 7).

<sup>58</sup> W.H.J. York, *Wealth and Wellness in Antiquity through the Middle Ages* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2012), 102–3. The literature on ancient Near Eastern medicine is growing rapidly. On the supernatural causes of illness, see J. Scurlock and B.R. Andersen, *Diagnoses in Assyrian and Babylonian Medicine: Ancient Sources, Translations, and Modern Medical Analyses* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 429–528.

<sup>59</sup> G. Eknoyan, "The Kidneys in the Bible: What Happened?" *JASN* 16/12 (2005), 3464–71. Eknoyan notes that, "Only in later periods did a special group of healers who were not members of priesthood arise. Even then, sickness continued to be attributed to hostile spirits or the anger of a deity, so medications, no matter how powerful or effective, were expected only to alleviate symptoms. It was the incantations, spells, and prayers recited conjointly that could remove the cause of the disease and cure it."

<sup>60</sup> Needless to say, while physical and mental disabilities were often seen in antiquity as resulting from divine agency, they were nonetheless part of societal constructs whereby social hierarchies and inequalities were created, negotiated and maintained. See Olyan,

vance of the commandments of the Torah would result in being hit by a slew of severe diseases (Ex 15:26; Deut 28:22, 27–29, 35) one of which is שחין רע. For instance, H. Avalos argues that Deut 28:15, 22 make clear that “Yahweh used illness to enforce covenants made with humans. Such covenants promised health and longevity to those who followed Yahweh’s stipulations, but illness and death to those who did not.” He adds that repeatedly “Yahweh employs illnesses to . . . punish evildoers in DtrH and in the Chronicler, and to test Job.”<sup>61</sup> J. Wilkinson extends this idea to include passages from Exodus, Leviticus, Psalms, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Hosea.

In Job’s case, both he and any observer would consider the sudden affliction with a שחין רע to be punishment for some transgression. A. Erickson remarks, Job’s language assumes

a relationship between divine law and disease and disability, evident in numerous biblical and Mesopotamian texts. In the ancient Near East, suffering was often understood as evidence of divine judgment on sinful human behavior.<sup>62</sup> Leprosy or a similar skin disease (*garābu* and *saḥaršubbū*) was ‘one of the most unambiguous sanctions’ for sin in the ancient world.<sup>63</sup> Job’s body, clothed in disintegrating skin (see 7:5), would likely have suggested to ancient readers divine sanction for sin.<sup>64</sup>

F.R. Magdalene argues that the thought pattern emerging from this worldview is as follows: “If the gods and their law are perfect, and, if disability, disease, and disaster are divine punishment for sin committed, then such traumas and tragedies must be the moral responsibility of those who experience them. The sufferer’s punishment is always deserved.”<sup>65</sup> Job’s dilemma is seeing obvious evidence of sin on his skin, but knowing in his mind that there could be no sin.<sup>66</sup> Thus, the healing of Job’s

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Disability in the Hebrew Bible, as well as the comments by M.M. Homan in his review of Olyan’s monograph. JHS 9. Cited 6/11/14. Online: [http://www.jhsonline.org/reviews/reviews\\_new/review363.htm](http://www.jhsonline.org/reviews/reviews_new/review363.htm).

<sup>61</sup> H. Avalos, *Illness and Health Care in the Ancient Near East: The Role of the Temple in Greece, Mesopotamia, and Israel* (HSM 54; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 242–44. See also J. Wilkinson, *The Bible and Healing: A Medical and Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998), 14–15.

<sup>62</sup> E. Ebeling, *Keilschrifttexte aus Assur religiösen Inhalts* (2 vols.; WUANT, 28; Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 1915), 1:31–32. The texts indicate that a human’s suffering constitutes legal judgment for his or her guilt.

<sup>63</sup> K. van der Toorn, *Sin and Sanction in Israel and Mesopotamia: A Comparative Study* (SSN 22; Assen: Van Gorcum, 1985), 73.

<sup>64</sup> A. Erickson, “‘Without My Flesh I Will See God’: Job’s Rhetoric of the Body,” *JBL* 132/2 (2013), 295–313 (298). Erickson uses the conceptual framework and terminology of disability studies, a new arrival in academic humanities.

<sup>65</sup> Magdalene, “ANE Legal Origins of Impairment,” 26.

<sup>66</sup> Classen (“Job, Theology and Disability,” 57) detects in the book of Job “glimpses of a counter narrative that moves toward a new kind

sores would have removed the stigma of being a sinner, and restored his position vis-à-vis God and society. Healing of Job's skin would be a clear and visible sign of his vindication. In v. 26 Job expresses the certainty that his redeemer would heal him.

This understanding is obtained by reading וְאָחַד "and he would unite" instead MT וְאַחֲרַי "and afterwards." Such reading assumes a ר/ד confusion and revocalization. The ר/ד confusion is, however, well attested in the Tanakh, and the vocalization of the text in the Tanakh is rather late, occurring after the original text was probably already corrupted.<sup>67</sup> In particular, it is notable that in Isa 66:17 some read אַחַד אַחַד instead of אַחֲרַי אַחַד. The verbal form of אַחַד is rare; it occurs only in Ezra 21:21.<sup>68</sup> In later Hebrew, Jastrow mentions examples of the participle passive אֲחֻדִים in *Yalkut Genesis* 62 (in the sense *closed up*) and *Genesis Rabba* sec. 38 (in the sense *joined, united*).<sup>69</sup> The rarity of the verb might have been the cause of the ר/ד confusion in our verse.

The problematic phrase נִקְפוּ-זֹאת is taken as being an aside, directed to the friends and meaning "mark this, note this." The verb נִקְפוּ is the 3d person masculine plural *Pi'el* perfect of נָקַף I. This verbal form occurs only here. Lexica mention only three instances of occurrences in the Tanakh (Isa 10:34; 24:13; Job 19:26). However, it is possible that Isa 29:1 and Lev 19:27 are also instances of נָקַף I, if they are understood to refer to marking off. Mandelkern observes that the root נָקַף I is kindred to נָקַב, which could have the meaning "mark, note" (Am 6:1), and it is notable that the *Pi'el* of נָקַב is associated

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of speech regarding disability and theology, particularly to what it means to be human."

<sup>67</sup> One finds in the *Ketib-Qere* apparatus this confusion in 2 Sam 13:37 עִמְיָחוּר (Ketib) but עִמְיָחוּד (Qere); 2 Kgs 16:6 וְאֲרוֹמִים (K) but וְאֲרוֹמִים (Q); Prov 19:19 גִּרְלָהּ (K) but גִּדְלָהּ (Q); Jer 2:2 אֲעִבֹד (K) but אֲעִבֹד (Q); Jer 31:39 הַשְּׂרָמוֹת (K) but הַשְּׂרָמוֹת (Q); and Ezra 8:14 חֹבֹד (K) but חֹכֹר (Q). In Hab 3:12 LXX reads "you will bring low" (ὀλιγώσεις), probably reading תַּצְעֵר instead of תַּצְעֵד; in Hab 3:13 LXX translates יִסֹּד as "bands or bonds" (δεσμοὺς), implying a reading יִסֹּר or אִסֹּר; and in Hab 3:16 LXX translates יְגוּדֵנוּ as "of my sojourning" (יְגוּרֵנוּ). This may be a late interpretation, made in the Diaspora, based on the common ר/ד confusion. In his commentary on 1 Chr 1:7, Kimchi notes, "Since the ד and ר are similar in appearance, and among the readers of the genealogies which were written in ancient times, some read a ד and some read a ר, some names were preserved for posterity in two forms with either a ד or a ר." Kimchi explains that the Tanakh preserved both traditions by recording these names one way in certain locations and the other way in others. For instance, דְּעוּאֵל (Num 1:14; 7:42, 47; 10:20)/רְעוּאֵל (Num 2:14), דּוּדָנִים (Gen. 10:4)/רוּדָנִים (1 Chr 1:7, 6), רַבְלָה (2 Kgs 23:33; 25:21; Jer 39:6; 52:26)/דְּבַלָה (Ezra 16:14), רִיפַת (Gen 10:3)/דִּיפַת (1 Chr 1:6).

<sup>68</sup> S. Mandelkern, *Veteris Testamenti Concordantiae Hebraicae Atque Chaldaicae* (Lipsiae: Viet et Comp., 1896), 29d.

<sup>69</sup> M. Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and Midrashic Literature* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Traditional Press, 1903), 38b.

with marking by name (Num 1:17; Ezra 8:20; 1 Chr 12:31; 16:41; 2 Chr 28:15; 31:19).<sup>70</sup> As we shall see, Job is convinced that God would eventually vindicate him and would heal his skin and flesh. This is something that is to happen in the future and therefore could be forgotten. Job believes that it should be noted and recorded in a non-perishable way (vv. 23–24), and serve as a retroactive vindication and manifestation of his trust in God.<sup>71</sup>

Our analysis clearly shows that the phrase **ומבשרי אחזה** with the MT vocalization marks is problematic, because it suggests that Job would see God but does not mention any consequences of such an encounter. R. Gordis rightly observed: “As has been often noted, the verse cannot refer to Job seeing God after his body decays. Nor, coming after the vision of God, can the passage refer to his present sufferings.”<sup>72</sup> The only other time where **ומבשרי** occurs is Job 19:22 where the phrase **ומבשרי לא תשבועו** literally means “and (eating) from my flesh you are not sated.” However, “from my flesh I will see” makes no sense.

These dilemmas are resolved by not having Job see God at all. Such an understanding can be obtained if v. 26b is read **ומבשרי יאחז** and **אלוה + וְ** is relegated to the following verse. The proposed emendation assumes that a **י** following **ומבשרי** dropped out by haplography; **יאחז** should be vocalized **יאחז** “will be held”; a **ז** in **אחזה** dropped out by haplography; originally **וְ** followed **יאחז**; and, **וְ אלוה** belongs to the following verse. While this detailing of assumed emendations might appear extensive, it actually does minimal violence to the consonantal text.

The parallelism of **עור** and **בשר** in the two cola of v. 26 requires a verb that is synonymous with **אחד** in the second half of the verse. It seems obvious that **יאחז** offers the best option. Absence of the **י** in the MT can be justified by haplography or by cases of a missing **י** at the beginning of a word attested to in the *Ketib-Qere* apparatus (1 Sam 20:2 **עשה** [Ketib] but **יעשה**

<sup>70</sup> R. Gordis, *The Book of Job: Commentary, New Translation, and Special Notes* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1978), 206. Gordis rightly sensed that **נקפו** means “mark off.” He says, “**נקפו** is difficult whether derived from **נקף** I ‘strike out’ (Ibn Ezra, Wright) whence ‘after my skin which they struck off’ (BDB), or ‘if my skin be crushed’ (Hölscher), or from **נקף** II ‘go around off.’ The latter root in the Hiphil (Lev. 19:27) has the meaning ‘round off,’ which suggests for our passage ‘mark off’” (ibid.).

<sup>71</sup> Some commentators felt that there is a discontinuity between vv. 23–24 and the text that follows. For instance, J.E. Hartley comments that in v. 25, “Job abruptly breaks off his wishful thinking and proclaims his deepest conviction. With the heading I know (**אני ידעתי**) Job affirms that his conviction is firm and decisive. Whereas he has just been speaking hypothetically, he now speaks with assurance as he proclaims: I know that my redeemer lives; in the end he will stand on the dust.” Cf. J.E. Hartley, *The Book of Job* (NICOT; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1988), 292.

<sup>72</sup> Gordis, *Job*, 206.

[Qere], Isa 28:15 עבר [K] but יעבור [Q], Jer 50:8 יצאו [K] but צאו [Q], Ezra 47:10 יעמדו [K] but עמדו [Q]). V. 27 has a demonstrative tenor. The demonstrative זה occurs thirteen times in Job and the phrase X + זה, where X a name of the deity, occurs frequently in the Tanakh (Ex 15:2; Isa 23:13; 25:9; Ps 24:8–10; 48:15; Neh 9:18; 1 Sam 6:20). Finally, in v. 27 the form ל + אחז is attested in 2 Sam 2:21. The suggested text critical approach essentially relies on the typical scribal error of haplography.<sup>73</sup> However, it is possible that already in antiquity this typical scribal error served as rationalization for making tendentious changes that resulted in the MT.

In the interpretation proposed here, the emended v. 26 reads וְאֶחָד עוֹרִי (נִקְפְּזֵזֵאת) וּמִבְּשָׂרִי יֶאֱחָז “and he will unite my skin (note this) and from my flesh will it be held.”<sup>74</sup> This reading makes eminent sense. Job, expresses in v. 26 his certainty that his redeemer would heal his wounds and attach his hanging skin to his flesh. He wants his friends to note what he said, and perhaps bring about a change in their attitude, as will be shown in the following section. The proposed reading also explains a notable omission in the epilogue, which does not mention Job’s restored health. If the proposed reading is correct, then the author did not have to mention the restoration of Job’s health. Any ancient reader would have understood that God’s manifestation to Job would have automatically included a full restoration of his health as Job describes in v. 26.<sup>75</sup>

<sup>73</sup> E. Tov, *The Textual Criticism of the Bible: An Introduction* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1989), 190.

<sup>74</sup> In contrast to v. 20 where the skin hangs on the bones or flesh without skin sticks to the bones. Cf. 7:5.

<sup>75</sup> N.P. Heeßel, “Diagnosis, Divination and Disease: Towards an Understanding of the Rationale Behind the Babylonian Diagnostic Handbook,” in H.F.J. (M.) Hortmanshoff and M. Stol (eds.), *Magic and Rationality in Ancient Near Eastern and Greco-Roman Medicine* (Studies in Ancient Medicine 27; Leiden: Brill, 2004), 97–116. Heeßel (*ibid.*, 98) observes that

For the Babylonians the aetiology of disease and sickness was situated in the realm of the gods. Falling ill was seen as a sign that the patient had lost the equilibrium he ideally lived in. Either some god had turned against him and through physical contact had placed the sickness directly inside the human body, or the personal protective god had left the person open to attacks by demons or ill-wishing human beings . . . The reconciliation of the patient with the god is, therefore, essential for healing the patient . . .

Chaham (*Sepher Job*, 331 n. 108) notes that the phrase שָׁב (שְׁבוּת) שְׁבִית, which is used several times with respect to nations that have been exiled and then returned to their homeland, indicates that Job was cured and able to return to his home. The phrase means literally “returned the captives,” but could also mean in a more general sense “restore fortunes,” which would logically also include his healing.

## CONTEXT

In v. 25, just before v. 26, Job refers to a “redeemer” who would make a dramatic change in his condition. Who is Job’s redeemer (גֹּאֵל)?<sup>76</sup> Commentators were misled by the forensic function of the גֹּאֵל to the point of attributing to him appearance in a court.<sup>77</sup> However, the function of the גֹּאֵל, as described in the emended v. 26, makes it abundantly clear that the redeemer in v. 25 who will heal Job can be only God. The sequence of disasters that befell Job could be only perceived as being a heavenly punishment and consequently his healing could also be only a heavenly act.<sup>78</sup> Indeed, the strictly mono-

<sup>76</sup> See for instance M.C. Barré, “A Note on Job xix 25,” *VTS* 29 (1969), 107–10 (107–9); M.J. Dahood, “Hebrew-Ugaritic Lexicography IX,” *Bib* 52 (1971), 337–56 (346); N.H. Ridderbos, “גֹּאֵל als Staub des Totenortes,” *OTS* 5 (1948), 174–78; S. Mowinckel, “Hiobs *gō’ēl* und Zeuge im Himmelm,” *BZAW* 41 (1925), 207–22 (207–12); A.R. Johnson, “The Primary Meaning of גֹּאֵל,” *VTS* 1 (1953), 67–77; N.H. Snaith, “The Hebrew Root G’L (I),” *ALUOS* 3 (1961–1962), 60–67 (65–67); E. Beaucamp, “Le *gō’ēl* de Jb 19,25,” *LTP* 33 (1977), 309–10; W.T. Smith, “New Renderings of Job xix.23–27,” *ExpTim* 3 (1891–1892), 60; J.J. Stamm, “גֹּאֵל *g’l* to redeem,” in E. Jenni and C. Westermann (eds.), *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament* (trans. M.E. Biddle; 3 vols.; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1977), 1:291; H. Ringgren, “גֹּאֵל *ga’al*; גֹּאֵל *go’el*; גֹּאֵל *g’ullah*,” in G.J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren (eds.), *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, (revised edition; trans. J.T. Willis; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1977), 2:351; F.R. Magdalene, “Who is Job’s Redeemer: Job 19.25 in Light of Neo-Babylonian Law,” *ZABR* 10 (2004), 292–316, etc.

<sup>77</sup> Some consider v. 25b using legal language. Clines (*Job 1–20*, 460) notes, “The ‘last’ (אָהֳרֹן) to rise in a lawsuit is presumably the winner of the dispute; we have no real parallels to this usage, and it is true that in the dispute with God in this book, it is Job himself who literally has the last word (42:2–6).” Cf. S. Mowinckel, “Hiobs *gō’ēl* und Zeuge im Himmelm,” in K. Budde (ed.), *Vom Alten Testament: Festschrift Karl Marti* (BZAW 41; Giessen: Verlag Alfred Töpelmann, 1925), 207–22 (208). Traditional interpretation assumed that Job is identifying God as his redeemer. Several modern interpreters found it illogical that God would defend Job against God. They identify the redeemer in this passage as the heavenly witness that Job believed would testify for him (16:19). The redeemer is an arbiter, one other than God, who will arise to defend Job before God. The proposed emendation circumvents this difficulty.

<sup>78</sup> The assumption that Job’s “redeemer” pleads his case, led to the following main interpretations: a) Job’s “words” in v. 23 would metaphorically argue his case; b) some heavenly being, other than God, will plead Job’s case before God; and, c) God is the “redeemer.” There are obvious problems with each of the three interpretations. The proposed emendation of v. 26 eliminates the difficulties associated with the nature of the “redeemer,” since it views the redeemer as a *bealer* rather than a *litigant*. Also, as H. Strauß (*Hiob*, 2. Teilband. 19,1–42,17 [2 vols.; BKAT, 16; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2000], 2:17) observes, “Alle diejenigen, die in irgendeiner Weise den גֹּאֵל als von Gott unterschieden verstehen

theistic book of Job could but see God as the healer (Ex 15:26; Deut 32:39). Moreover, this divine monopoly on healing perhaps explains the hostile view of physicians, who are sanctioned and enjoined throughout most of the Tanakh, and even Job calls them “*physicians of no value*” (Job 13:4).<sup>79</sup>

The term גַּאֵל also functions as one of God’s titles. This notion is rooted in the interpretation of Israel’s deliverance from Egyptian bondage (e.g., Ex 6:6; 15:13; Ps 74:2; 77:16). It rests on the theological rationale: since God brought Israel into existence as a nation, he recognizes his obligation to deliver them from all hostile foes.<sup>80</sup> Thus, God is considered to be the redeemer from Babylonian Exile (Isa 41:14; 43:1–7, 14; 44:22, 23, 24; 49:7–9, 26) and in personal relations the avenger of wrong (Ps 19:15; 119:154; Prov 23:11). Gordis rightly comments, “In view of the uncompromising monotheism of the Book of Job, there is no basis for postulating a third, intermediate being either as a kinsman in our passage, or as an arbiter (9:33), or as a witness (6:1) . . . It is God to whom Job appeals and whom he sees rising to vindicate even in the distant future.”<sup>81</sup> Indeed, as F.I. Andersen says, “verses 25–27 are so tightly knit that there should be no doubt that the redeemer is God.”<sup>82</sup>

Job knows that God exists and is active (גַּאֵלֵי חַי), and that He will eventually heal him.<sup>83</sup> He wants this knowledge noted by his friends (נִקְפְּרִיזֹאת) and recorded (vv. 23–24). Weiser observes, “Während in V. 25 der entscheidende Akt der erhofften Erhörung Rechtfertigung Hiobs in der göttlichen Perspektive, d. h. von Gott her gesehen wird, ist in V. 26–27 dasselbe Ereignis unter dem menschlichen Gesichtswinkel als die Begegnung Hiobs mit Gott dargestellt.”<sup>84</sup>

In v. 27 Job goes on to describe the God that he holds on to. This meaning is obtained by repointing MT אֶחְזֶה־לִּי “I will see for myself” and reading instead אֶחְזֶה־לִּי “I will hold on

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wollen, müssen zunächst den Tatbestand überwinden, daß im nächsten (V. 26b) wie im weiteren Kontext erkennbar von niemand anderem als von dem Gott die Rede ist, zu dem und vor dem Hiob (und seine Freunde) reden.”

<sup>79</sup> Cf. B.L. Gordon, “Medicine among the Ancients Hebrews,” *Annals of Medical History* 4 (1942), 219–35; N. Allan “The Physician in Ancient Israel: His Status and Function,” *Medical History* 45 (2001), 377–94; M.B. Gordon, “Medicine among the Ancient Hebrews,” *Isis* 33 (1941), 454–85.

<sup>80</sup> Hartley, *Job*, 292.

<sup>81</sup> Gordis, *Job*, 206. The phrase “even in the distant future” for אֶחְזֶה is adequately captured by “eventually, at last.” N. Whybray (*Job*, [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998], 96) notes: “אֶחְזֶה (v. 25b) probably means ‘at last’ rather than ‘at the last,’ which would give the word an eschatological sense.”

<sup>82</sup> Andersen, *Job*, 194.

<sup>83</sup> In contrast to human-made idols, God is often characterized as being alive (e.g., Deut 5:23; Josh 3:10; Jer 10:10; 23:36; Dan 12:7; cf. Job 27:2). Cf. also Job 16:19.

<sup>84</sup> A. Weiser, *Das Buch Hiob* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1951), 150.

to.”<sup>85</sup> Twice in the book of Psalms God is depicted as metaphorically holding on to the righteous in a gesture of support (Ps 73:23; 139:10). Job reverses this metaphor by stating that *he* holds on to God in this plea for vindication, and perhaps has in mind the same notion as in **בְּאֲשֶׁר אָחֲזָה רַגְלִי דְרָכּוֹ שְׁמֵרָתִי וְלֹא־אֶטֵּט** (23:11; see also 17:9).

The minor emendation of MT **אָחֲזָה־לִּי** into **אָחֲזָה־לִּי** (ומבשרי יאחז) in v. 26. The author, by cleverly choosing the verb **אָחַז** in both places, succeeded in indicating that Job holds on to a healing and vindicating God. Moreover, the God that he holds on to is understandable and apparent (**וְעֵינַי יִרְאוּ**) and does not require attestation by anyone else (**זֶר**).<sup>86</sup> It is a God that is immediately sensed and understood (as when he heals Job of his affliction), not one that is described by the teaching of tradition and testimony of the ancients.

MT v. 27b, **כָּלֹ כְלִיתִי בַחֲקִי** “my kidneys are spent in my bosom,” dealing with Job’s desires by means of a kidneys metaphor, naturally belongs to v. 28.<sup>87</sup> The emended v. 28, reading **כָּלֹ כְלִיתִי בַחֲקִי כִּי תֵאֱמָרוּ מֵה־נִרְדַּף־לּוֹ וּשְׂרַשׁ דְּבַר נִמְצָא־בּוֹ**, echoes vv. 21–22. The kidneys, always used in the plural (**כְּלָיֹת**), are mentioned more than 30 times in the Bible, and twice in Job (16:13; 19:27).<sup>88</sup> In ancient Hebrew “psychology” they were considered the seat of conscience (Jer 11:20; 17:10; 20:12; Ps 7:10; 16:7; 26:2), temperament, desire, emotions, prudence, vigor, and wisdom (Ps 16:7; 73:21; Prov 23:16; Isa 34:6; Jer 12:2). Thus, the phrase **כָּלֹ כְלִיתִי בַחֲקִי** should be understood as describing Job’s deep sorrow that his friends continue to prosecute him (v. 22). He pines that they become friendlier and less doctrinaire. He strongly desires that they do a “reality check,” and say: **מֵה־נִרְדַּף־לּוֹ וּשְׂרַשׁ דְּבַר נִמְצָא־בּוֹ**, “Why do we pursue him? Has any root of fault been found in him?”

Chaham observes that any time **מָה** is followed by the imperfect some deliberation or doubt is expressed.<sup>89</sup> The language of v. 28 requires that it should be understood as an expression of hesitance or reconsideration by Job’s friends. Job desires that his friends confront the reality of his innocence and see the senselessness in their relentless pursuit.<sup>90</sup> The proposed

<sup>85</sup> In MT **אָחֲזָה־לִּי** repeats **וְעֵינַי יִרְאוּ**.

<sup>86</sup> This minor emendation, assuming omission of the **י** in **יִרְאוּ** by haplography, harmonizes the tenses of the last three verbs. Job’s eyes will see God’s action when his skin is cured.

<sup>87</sup> A. Merx, *Das Gedicht von Hiob* (Jena: Mauke’s Verlag, 1871), 96. Merx also attaches v. 27b to v. 28.

<sup>88</sup> Also in Akkadian, the plural (*kalāte*) appears already in cuneiform texts from 1700 B.C.E. Cf. P. Dhorme, “The Metaphorical Use of Names of Body Parts in Hebrew and Akkadian,” *RB* 32 (1922), 489–517; M.J. Geller, *Die babylonisch-assyrische Medizin in Texten und Untersuchungen* Vol VII: *Renal and Rectal Disease Texts* (7 vols.; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2005), 7:31–126.

<sup>89</sup> Chaham, *Sepher Job*, 151 n.33a.

<sup>90</sup> A.B. Ehrlich, *Randglossen zur hebräischen Bibel, VI. Psalmen, Sprüche, und Hiob* (7 vols.; Leipzig: J.C. Hinricks, 1918), 258. With regard

reading of v. 28, בו instead of בי, contains the assumption of וי/ו confusion, which occurs many times in the Tanakh and is well attested in the *Ketib-Qere* apparatus.<sup>91</sup>

The logical flow of vv. 21–28 is apparent. Job begins with a plea to his friends for compassion (vv. 21–22) and concludes with a similar reference to his friends (v. 28), delineating by this *inclusio* the thematic unit. He would like his words to become a permanent record for humanity (vv. 23–24). What these words are is spelled out in vv. 25–26: וְאֵנִי יֹדְעֵתִי גְּאֵלִי חַי וְאַחֲרוֹן עַל עֲפָרָי. The message is short, but says it all. Job expresses his steadfast belief in an involved (חַי) God and his eventual personal vindication, manifested by being healed. This, he states to his friends, is the God that he holds on to. Job concludes by addressing his friends with his deep seated wish (v. 28); that they ask themselves honestly “Why do we pursue him? Has any root of fault been found in him?”

Job’s speech ends with a warning to his friends (v. 29), which is poignant in its skepticism. Since he is innocent, they are false accusers; and that is a crime deserving severe punishment (Deut 19:16–21).<sup>92</sup> They should know that there is a Judge and that they are not immune to judgment.

## CONCLUSION

Gordis notes that:

It is impossible to summarize, let alone discuss, the vast variety of emendations and interpretations of this passage [vv. 23–29]. Virtually the only element of consensus among moderns, as against older exegetes, is that the passage does *not* refer to resurrection after death in view of Job’s clear-cut rejection of the doctrine in 14:7–23.<sup>93</sup>

Perhaps, another consensus can be detected in commentators’ implicit or explicit indication that the original text is corrupt or

to vv. 28–29, Ehrlich states on the same page, “Diesem [v. 28] und dem folgenden Verse vermag ich keinen auch nur halbwegs leidlichen Sinn abzugewinnen. Ich halte den Text dieser beiden Verse für hoffnungslos verderbt.”

<sup>91</sup> Chaham, *Sepher Job*, 151 n. 33. Chaham implicitly suggests that MT reading might be a scribe’s interpretative correction. The reading בו is in accord with the *Versions* (except Peshitta) and about 100 MSS; it is also in harmony with the preceding לו. There are at least 294 וי/ו confusions in the *Ketib-Qere* apparatus.

<sup>92</sup> This understanding requires reading הַמָּה instead of הָמָה. In the early square script, ה and ח differed only in the extension of the top bar. The *Ketib-Qere* apparatus attests to the ה/ח confusion in 2 Sam 13:37 where עֲמִיחֹר (Ketib) but עֲמִיחֹר (Qere); Prov 20:21 where מִבְּחֵלֶת (K) but מִבְּחֵלֶת (Q); Song 1:17 where רְחִיטָנוּ (K) but רְחִיטָנוּ (Q); Dan 9:29 where וּלְחַתֶּם (K) but וּלְחַתֶּם (Q); and, 2 Sam 23:25 which has הַחֲרָדִי but 1 Chr 11:27 has הַחֲרָרִי. Also, Gen 2:14 MT has חֲדָקַל but the Samaritan Pentateuch has הַדְּקַל; Gen 25:9 MT has צָחַר but the Samaritan Pentateuch has צָחַר, etc.

<sup>93</sup> Gordis, *Job*, 528.

has been tampered with, and that is why “to look for total logical consistency in these verses is unrealistic.”<sup>94</sup>

This sentiment has guided the text-critical approach to the interpretation of v. 26 in the current study. The proposed reading (note this) and from my flesh will it be held,” is obtained by making few minor consonantal emendations in the MT. These emendations can be easily rationalized as being omissions caused by haplography or confusions of similar letters, which occurred in the transcription of the text.<sup>95</sup>

The restored text gives an eminently good intra-verse sense and a solid contextual logic. Job’s declaration would read:

And I know that my redeemer lives, וַאֲנִי יָדַעְתִּי גְּאֻלִּי חַי 25

And at last will manifest his self. וְאַחֲרָיוֹן עַל עֵפֶר יִקּוּם

And he will unite my skin (mark this), וְאַחַד עוֹרִי (נִקְפֹּז־זֹאת) 26

And from my flesh will it be held. וּמִבְּשָׂרִי יֵאָחַז 27

This is the God that I will hold on to, זֶה אֱלֹהֵי אֲשֶׁר אֲחַזְּקֶה-לִי

And my eyes will see, and not a stranger. וְעֵינַי יִרְאוּ וְלֹא זָר

Kidneys in my bosom are longing, כָּלֹ כְּלִיתִי בַחֲקִי 28

For you to say: “Why do we pursue him?” כִּי תֹאמְרוּ מֵה־נִרְדֹּף-לּוֹ

Has any root of fault been found in him?” וְשֵׁרֶשׁ דְּבַר נִמְצָא-בּוֹ

This text can be paraphrased: “Job is certain that God exists and would eventually manifest himself on earth in his favor. This God would heal his wounds and attach his skin to the flesh. This is the God that he holds on to and *his* eyes will see (the healing). His innards pine in his bosom to hear his

<sup>94</sup> Whybray, *Job*, 94.

<sup>95</sup> It is possible that the minor changes, which can be rationalized as being scribal errors, have been intentionally introduced to obtain a text that supports a particular theological view. However, whether the changes that were made in the original text were accidental or tendentious they were obviously minimal from the text-critical perspective.

friends say: ‘Why do we persecute him? What evidence was found about him?’ ”

Delitzsch felt that in vv. 25–28 Job’s “faith is here on the direct road to the hope of a resurrection; we see it germinating and struggling towards the light.”<sup>96</sup> The emended unit (vv. 25–28), which is consonantly almost identical with MT, shows that no metaphysical connotations can be entertained.<sup>97</sup> In this unit v. 26 plays a central role. Job expresses in this verse the conviction that God will manifest his vindication by healing him of his affliction.<sup>98</sup> This position is in accord with the views that were current in antiquity.

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<sup>96</sup> F. Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Book of Job*, (trans. F. Bolton; 2 vols; Clark’s Foreign Theological Library, 11; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1881), 1:362.

<sup>97</sup> Such as resurrection in flesh, seeing God in an instant before death, seeing God after death, etc.

<sup>98</sup> Erickson (“ ‘Without My Flesh I Will See God,’ ” 296) argues that,

Job overturns traditional images of the disintegrated body, known from the biblical laments, in order to distance his body’s appearance of guilt from the testimony of innocence. In contrast to the psalmists, who petition God to restore them to health, Job uses images of disembodiment and bodily disintegration to separate his broken body from his contention that he is innocent.