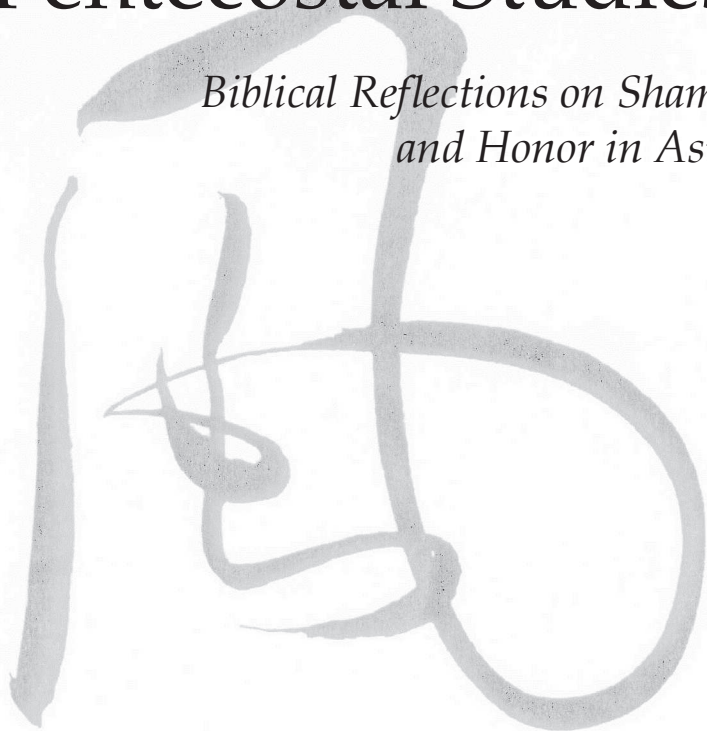


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True Friendship: Job 6:14-30

by Im Seok (David) Kang

Introduction

In spite of the fact that the book of Job has been preached from generation to generation due to its benefits for believers, we should ask, and scrutinize, what its meaning really is. Cline presents the significance of its meaning as a text, saying, “The author of a text such as Job had the intention of a readership for the work, and had the conception of a public that would desire the work – desire it enough to put their hand in their pocket for it.”¹ Some might say that the meaning of Job is to present the retribution principle, if one reads only the prologue (chapters 1 & 2) and the epilogue (42:7-17). Especially the great richness of the book can be understood as the consequence of Job’s piety by *waw consecutive* in the very first part (1:1-3), while others will see Job as the champion against dogmatism, or as the victim of a cruel world.

After reading the book of Job again and again, it seems there is another significant meaning which provokes its reader to notice, and seriously consider. It is the “true friendship” that will be accomplished by keeping *hesed* (loyalty) among friends. For this matter, I will investigate Job 6:14-30 in order to find some of the main keys for true friendship.

Historical Background

Despite the consensus that “Job is a literary work of the highest magnitude,”² it is rather surprising how little we know regarding its historical background. It seems that there is no book of either the Old Testament (OT) or the New Testament for which we have less sure knowledge regarding the author, the date of its writing, and the place of

¹David J. A. Clines, *Interested Parties: The Ideology of Writers and Readers of the Hebrew Bible* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 123.

²Gregory W. Parsons, “Literary Features of the Book of Job,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* (July 1981), 213.

its writing. Before scrutinizing its authorship, let us first consider the possible dates of Job.

The richness of the author's use of language makes it very difficult to date the book. Generally, there are three "camps" of opinion regarding its date, based on the language used and the relationship between Job and other Old Testament passages. In his commentary on Job, John Hartley makes a clear and simple summarization of these divergent camps and arrives at a conclusion with which I agree.³ He suggests that the book should be dated in the 7th century B.C. because of the close ties between it and Isaiah 40-55, and its many allusions to the Canaanite religion and contacts.⁴

Another question, then, to be raised is: "Who did write Job?" Unfortunately, we have no historical clue by which to investigate the authorship question. However, it does seem that we can decide about the author based on what we read in the book itself. Marvin presents an interesting comment about the authorship, saying: "There is no certainty that the author was an Israelite,"⁵ although we do find some familiarity with OT passages throughout the book. Marvin ascertains that the lamentation of Job should not be understood as a unique genre in Israel but, in fact, common in the ancient Near East. Furthermore, Rowley confirms this idea by presenting the views of others:

Humbert thought the book was composed in Egypt (cf. *Recherches sur les sources égyptiennes de la littérature sapientiale d'Israel*, 1929, pp. 75ff), and Dhorme stresses (pp. clxxif.) the author's acquaintance with Egypt. F. H. Foster (AJSL, XLIX, 1932-33, pp. 21ff) thought the book had been translated from an Arabic original, and Pfeiffer (op. cit., pp. 678ff.) thinks the author was an Edomite.⁶

However, most scholars hold that Job was part of the Wisdom Tradition of Israel, and Hartley believes the book's author fits the

³In his commentary, Hartley mentions three possible dates of the book of Job: (1) early 7th century B.C., which is during Hezekiah's time; (2) middle of the 6th century B.C., after the fall of Jerusalem; and (3) the 4th-3rd century B.C., which was the era of the second temple. He argues that the latter two periods are not acceptable. Although the suffering theme could be a good motif for the Exile, the Exile is to be understood as the punishment for the nation, which is different than what Job suffers for no reason.

⁴John E. Hartley, *The Book of Job*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans: 1988), 19-20.

⁵Marvin H. Pope, *Job: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, The Anchor Bible, 3rd ed (New York, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1983), XLI.

⁶H. H. Rowley, *The Book of Job*, The New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976), 23.

characterization of the ancient wise men of Israel. He draws attention to the author's extensive knowledge of nature, using five different words that refer to "lion" in 4:10-11, and 13 different words that refer to "jewels" in 28:15-19. Hartley also mentions that the author was well informed regarding "foreign" cultures, citing caravan travel in 6:18-20 as evidence for his wide range of cultural information.⁷ All things considered, the author of Job was a well-educated man, although we cannot be sure whether or not he was an Israelite.

Literary Context

Norman Gottwald is right when he says, about the literary genre of Job, that it is "a work so unique that it does not fall into any of the literary genres of antiquity or modernity."⁸ The richness of the author's vocabulary makes the readers confused as to how to recognize the book in terms of its literary genre. However, it was the form of critical studies that makes the basic literary genre of Job fall into three categories: the lawsuit, the lament, and the controversy dialogue. Richter classifies the genre as a secular lawsuit, with the various parts of the book corresponding to different stages of a lawsuit.⁹ For him, Job is against God, and his friends play the role of witnesses. On the other hand, Claus Westermann insists that the readers should take the lament as the predominate genre, which is attested to throughout the book. For this matter, he makes a confirmative statement that its interpretation should be taken as the lament.¹⁰

Hartley's observation is very significant for us to have better understanding. He criticizes the study of Richter as one-sided, and also defines Westermann's study as a descriptive term that does not categorize the whole book into one literary genre.¹¹ Even the fact that there exist other types of literary genres in Job, convinces that none of them can satisfy the overall genre that dominates the book as a whole. Thus, the sum of the matter is that one should categorize Job as "a mixed genre in which its author expertly blended a variety of literary types in order to serve the function of the book."¹²

⁷Hartley, 16.

⁸Norman K. Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible: A Socio-Literary Introduction* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1985), 472.

⁹Hartley, 37.

¹⁰Claus Westermann, "The Literary Genre of the Book of Job," in *Sitting with Job: Selected Studies on the Book of Job*, ed. Roy B. Zuck (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1992), 53.

¹¹Hartley, 38.

¹²Parsons, 215.

Presentation of the Text

Scripture Passage—Job 6:14-30

"To him who is despairing,¹³ loyalty¹⁴ *should be shown* by his friend, even though he forsakes the fear of the Almighty (v. 14). My brothers have been treacherous like a stream, like channels of streams they overflow (v. 15), which are dark because of the ice, *and* into which the snow vanishes (v. 16). When it is warm, they cease to flow; when it is hot, they vanish from their place (v. 17). The paths of their way turn aside, they go nowhere and perish (v. 18). The caravans of Tema look,¹⁵ the travelers of Sheba hope for them (v. 19). They are disappointed because they were confident; they come there and are confused (v. 20). For you have become to it, you see terror and you fear (v. 21). Did I ever say, 'Bring *something* to me?' or, 'Offer a bribe for me from your wealth' (v. 22)? or, 'Deliver me from the enemy's hand?' or, 'Redeem me from the hand of oppressors' (v. 23)? Teach me, and I will surely be silent; cause me to understand wherein I have erred (v. 24). How grievous are right words! But what does your arguing prove (v. 25)? Do you intend to rebuke *my* words, and the speeches of a desperate one, *which are* as wind (v. 26)? Yes, you overwhelm the fatherless, and you undermine your friend (v. 27). Now therefore, consider me whether I should lie to your face (v. 28)! Please stay! Let there be no injustice, and stay (*with me*), my righteousness is still in itself (v. 29). Is there injustice on my tongue? Cannot my taste discern the deceptive words (v. 30)?"

Textual Notes

In verse 14, some Hebrew manuscripts suggest reading סֶלֶל as סָלַל with the preposition לְ, which means "reject." In verse 17, a Hebrew manuscript reads it as סָלַל with the preposition כִּי instead of בִּי. In this case, there is no exegetical significance because both prepositions are

¹³Two verbal forms for סֶלֶל, which is the opening word, make it difficult to understand. One is סָלַל meaning "to dissolve" or "to melt," and the other is סָלַל meaning "despairing." Although it is not easy to distinguish them because both are used in similar contexts expressing physical and emotional distress, we read it as סָלַל ("despairing"). Most of the time, the verb סָלַל ("melt") comes with any force that causes it to happen. For instance, the bravest soldier's heart will melt because of fear in 2 Samuel 17:10 (Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament [TWOT] 1223).

¹⁴I suggest this to read לֹאֵל as "loyalty."

¹⁵Unlike the imperfect verbs in verse 18, perfect verbs are used in verses 19 and 20. Thus, we read 19-20 as follows: "The caravans of Tema looked, the travelers of Sheba hoped for them. They were disappointed because they were confident; they came there and were confused."

used in the same way with the infinitive construct verb. 3ms suffix is the subject of the infinitive verb, so it is read as “when it is hot.” In verse 19, the New King James Version (NKJV) textual note suggests reading *בָּטָח* (“he was confident”; 3ms perfect) as *בָּטְחוּ* (“they were confident”; 3mp perfect) for the agreement with its number.

In verse 21, it is significant to note that there appears *Qere* *לֹא־הָיִיתָ לֵּה*: *a Kethib* *לֹא* (“not”) and *Qere* *לֵּה* (“to him”). If we take *Kethib* *לֹא*, it means “for now you are nothing.” However, *Qere* *לֵּה* changes its meaning to, “for now you are his or its.” Probably the better rendering for this clause is, “for now you become like it” (i.e., a stream) as we consider the biblical idiom *לֵּה*, which means “to become.”

In verse 29, there appears another *Qere* which is insignificant in terms of its impact on the meaning of the text. The only difference between *Qere* *וְשִׁיבֵהוּ* (2mp imperative) and *Kethib* *וְשִׁיבֵהוּ* (2fs imperative) is the number.

Outline of the 6:14-30 Passage—Job’s Accusation Against His Friends

A. Treachery of His Friends (vv. 14-23)

1. *Hesed* as the role of a friend (v. 14)
2. Comparison of false friends with waterless streams (vv. 15-20)
3. Indictment of friends as nothing (v. 21)
4. Questions of false friends to discern their motives (vv. 22-23)

B. Request for Their Sympathy (vv. 24-30)

Treachery of His Friends (6:14-23)

Verse 14

Verse 14 serves as a topic statement that governs what is to follow. This verse is very difficult to translate because of the word arrangement. For this matter, scholars have tried to emend, and rearrange the words, in order to unlock its meaning.

The first difficulty we encounter is *לָמָס* (*lamas*). There are two possible roots for it: one is *מָסַס* (*masas*), which means “dissolve” or “melt”; the other is *מָס* (*mas*), which means “despairing.” Aside from them, many Hebrew manuscripts read it as *מָאָס*, or “refuse.” Thus, Hartley renders it as, “He who refuses loyal kindness.”¹⁶ However, I prefer to take it as, “to him who is despairing,” because we are not sure

¹⁶Hartely, 136.

whether the Qumran agrees with other variants suggesting “refuse.” In addition, there is no strong reason that the consonant ס from סאס is dropped, since it is combined with the preposition ל and the Hebrew definite article to become לסָּהֵל . Also, most of the time the verb סָּהֵל is used as the external reason that causes “to melt.” We see an example of this case from 2 Samuel 17:10 in the footnote. However, we cannot find any specific cause in the verse. Thus, in my estimation, its appropriate rendition is, “to him who is despairing.”

As we move forward in verse 14, the theological term חֶסֶד (*hesed*) challenges us. The conventional translation of this word is “kindness,” “steadfast love,” or “mercy.” The Revised Standard Version (RSV) usually renders it, “steadfast love,” and occasionally, “loyalty.” The New American Standard Bible (NASB) says, “loving kindness,” “kindness,” or “love.” The New International Version (NIV), “unfailing love.” The better translation of this word (again in my estimation) is “loyalty,” which guarantees a covenant relationship. Balentine stresses the significance of keeping loyalty in relation to covenant: “When humans fail God and break the covenant partnership, it is loyalty and faithfulness that motivates God to restore it.”¹⁷ Habel, in turn, applies it to true friendship: “True loyalty is expected from a friend when all other support systems fail, including faith in God.”¹⁸

As the topic statement of the latter part of chapter 6, verse 14 clarifies what Job really expects to receive from his friends. Although he still considers himself righteous and innocent, he identifies himself with those who forsake the fear of the Almighty and who despair, in order to demonstrate to his friends what true friendship really is. Unfortunately, they fail to show their loyalty to him.

Verse 15

In this verse, Job continues to compare his friends with some imagery. אֶחָיו (“my brothers”), which intensifies his disappointment with them. Intentionally, the author chooses this word rather than “friend,” to stress the responsibility, and solidarity, that they should show in times of tragedy. Job likens them to נַחַל (*nahal*) with repetition. They are treacherous like a stream (נַחַל), like channels of streams (נַחֲלִים), and they pass away (יַעֲבֹרוּ). As the main idea of יַעֲבֹרוּ is movement from place to place, its possible meaning is “to overflow” in its relation to נַחַל (*nahal*).

¹⁷Samuel E. Balentine, *Job*, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2006), 128.

¹⁸Norman C. Habel, *The Book of Job*, The Old Testament Library (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1985), 148.

So, the appropriate translation of verse 15 is, “My brothers have been treacherous like a stream, like channels of streams they overflow.”

Verses 16-17

These verses express what happens to streams of Palestine during the rainy season. Initially they are filled with melting snow, then they dry up as the snow disappears from the mountains, and finally they vanish in hot summer. The verb זָרַב (*zarab*) is *hapax legomenon*, appearing only in *pual* stem, meaning “be scorched.” It seems זָרַב is used to express the gradual process of the streams’ extreme extinction. This analogy clearly depicts Job’s indictment of his friends. They overflow with חֶסֶד (“loyalty”) during the good times; but when calamity comes, which is the very moment Job is in great need, they dry up and betray him.

Verses 18-20

The second image of waterless streams Job pictures is expressed in verse 18 by אֶרְקוֹת, which can be interpreted two ways: “paths” or “caravans.” We have to read *qamets* under its first consonant א, as *qamets hatuf*, and its ending, indicate that it is a feminine plural noun. Thus, both אֶרֶץ (“path”) and אֶרְקָה (“caravan”) can be rendered. However, I will take it as being “caravans” because of the two famous commercial cities mentioned in verse 19—Tema (an oasis to the southeast and a centre of trade routes) and Sheba (in South Arabia).¹⁹ The caravans from these cities, being expert in crossing the desert, were confident (בָּטָח) about how to find water on their journeys. Despite their confidence, however, they become ashamed (בָּשָׁו) and confounded (וַיִּתְּכָרוּ) because they, in fact, find no water (v. 20). Gordis takes בָּשָׁו and וַיִּתְּכָרוּ as synonyms and suggests reading them as, “be disappointed,” which is the modern equivalent.²⁰

Verse 21

In this verse, we have another difficulty to translate. *Kethib* reads the first clause, כִּי־עָתָה הִנִּיתָם, with the negative particle לֹא, rendering it, “For now you are nothing.” However, *Qere* suggests changing לֹא to לָ (a preposition with 3ms suffix) in relation to the preceding verb הָיָה, which means “to become.” I suggest rendering it as, “For you have

¹⁹Rowley, 63.

²⁰Robert Gordis, *The Book of Job: Commentary, New Translation, and Special Studies* (New York, NY: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1978), 75-6.

become to it.” Definitely, the 3ms suffix refers to waterless stream(s). Interestingly, some scholars, such as Gray, change the particle כִּי to כִּן and לָךְ to לִי, and read it as, “So now you become unto me.”²¹ We can also find wordplay in verse 21b, which we cannot acknowledge in other translations, as “you see” (*tiru*) and “you are afraid” (*tirau*). Regarding this wordplay, it is worthwhile to note Habel’s assertion that, “This wordplay, in turn, forms an inclusion with the ‘fear’ (*yira*) of Shaddai in the opening line of this *topos*.”²² Job’s comparing his friends to waterless streams is gradually intensified from verse 14 (in which he reminds them of the responsibility, and solidarity, of true friendship), to verse 21 (in which he openly declares that they are nothing but waterless streams).

Verses 22-23

In these verses, Job continues his indictment by asking these three friends what their attitudes, or motives, are. Unlike the obligation of a covenant friend to “rescue his partner from any trouble,”²³ Job has not requested that they give a reward, and wealth (v. 22), nor that they redeem him from his oppressors (v. 23).

Request for Sympathy (24-30)

Verse 24

Job dramatically changes his mood in order to make an earnest request to his friends for their sympathy. Verse 24 begins with the imperative verbs הוֹדִינוּ (“teach me”) and הִבִּינוּ לִי (“cause me to understand”), both in the *Hifil* stem. Especially the verb אֶתְקַיֵּשׁ (“I will be silent”) shows Job’s willingness to listen to them if they are capable of showing what he has done wrong, and of instructing him on how to overcome his alienation from the Almighty. His willingness is intensified by placing the subject אֲנִי before the verb אֶתְקַיֵּשׁ, so it reads: “I will surely be silent.” The following verb שָׁגָה (*shag*) assures that Job does not deny the possibility that he has sinned throughout the dialogue. TWOT defines the word as “to err,” the primary emphasis of which is on sin done unconsciously.²⁴

²¹Homer Heater, Jr., *A Septuagint Translation Technique in the Book of Job*, The Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph, Series 11 (Washington, DC: The Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1982), 47.

²²Habel, 149.

²³Hartley, 139.

²⁴TWOT, 2325.

While being confident of his righteousness before God, Job asks his friends to make him aware if there have been some sins he had committed inadvertently. In other words, he keeps insisting he is conscious of no act deserving of his terrible present situation. Unlike his expectation, they assert that their words are upright, and request him to repent of those sins they regard as reasons for his present situation.

Verses 25-26

Now Job raises questions to his friends for the purpose of accusation. Verse 25 begins with the exclamation, מַה־נִּמְרָצוּ אִמְרֵי־יֹשֶׁר (‘‘How forceful are right words!’’). Here, the verb מָרַץ (*maras*) is problematic as to its meaning. Some translate it as ‘‘grievous.’’ Others, like Pope, translate it as ‘‘be sweet,’’ by exchanging ר for ל for the purpose of alliteration. So, it’s rendered: ‘‘How sweet are upright speeches!’’ as an ironic device.²⁵ Rowley, however, strongly argues for ‘‘grievous,’’ because he thinks there’s no reason for Job to use an ironic device in order to renew his sarcasm.²⁶

The verb יָכַח follows, and is used twice in succession, one in the imperfect form, and the other in the infinitive absolute form. There are a variety of uses regarding the infinitive absolute form in Hebrew, one of the most common being an emphatic function. When the infinitive absolute precedes (or follows) an imperfect (or a perfect) verb, it is to emphasize the meaning of the verb (using the same roots).²⁷ Thus, it might be read as: ‘‘What do you indeed reprove from you?’’ However, its meaning is still awkward. For this reason, Hartley suggests identifying this infinitive absolute as the subject of the preceding verb יָכַח, which appears in the imperfect form.²⁸ In this case, the appropriate rendering of 25b is, ‘‘But what does your arguing prove?’’ Verse 25, therefore, expresses that his friends’ speeches are right in terms of dogmatism, but they are grievous words that cannot ease his suffering at this moment. The allusion is that there must be something else rather than argumentation—and that ‘‘something else’’ is, *hesed* (loyalty). We can read verses 25 and 26 in *chiastic* structure. Thus, the speeches of a desperate one (אִמְרֵי־נָא) are closely connected with right words (אִמְרֵי־יֹשֶׁר). Again, his friends were adamant that Job is wrong.

²⁵Hartley, 139.

²⁶Rowley, 64.

²⁷Gary D. Pratico and Miles V. Vanpelt, *Basics of Biblical Hebrew Grammar* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 252.

²⁸Hartley, 139.

Verse 27

Some ambiguities make verse 27 difficult to translate. One of them is the verb נָפַל, whose literal meaning in the *Qal* stem is to “fall,” “lie,” or “be cast down.” However, it is used here in the *Hifil* stem, which usually conveys the meaning “cause to fall.” Most of the time, *Hifil* verbs are used as transitive, while objects are followed by the *Hilfil* verbs. But in verse 27, there’s a difficulty with regard to the relationship between the verb and its object יָתוֹם (*orphan*) because of the preposition עַל. Gordis explains that תַּפִּילוֹ גְּרִלּוֹת (“cast lots”) [cf. 1 Sam. 14:42], עַל־יָתוֹם has been emended to עָלֵי תָם (“over the innocent”).²⁹ Thus, it might be read as, “you cast lots over the innocent.”

Another difficulty in reading this verse is its second verb, כָּרַה, which the NKJV reads as “to dig” or “undermine.” However, I hold that a better rendering would be, “to trade or bargain,” as we consider both the first and the second lines of this verse as parallelism. Furthermore, the notion of bargaining Job might be intensified if we can treat it as “to bargain over the price of fish.”³⁰ He has been abandoned by his friends and feels like property for the trade. For they failed to play a significant role of *hesed* (loyalty) as genuine friends, but rather chose to become experts in argument.

Verses 28-30

Now we come to the last part of chapter 6 where Job makes an ardent appeal to his friends. That appeal is clearly conveyed by using the verb יָצָא, the literal meaning of which is to “be willing,” “be content,” or “be determined.” TWOT provides a better understanding about the verb’s causative aspect: “The primary meaning of this verb is to make a volitional decision to commence a given activity.”³¹ הוֹצִאֵלּוּ takes an imperative form in the *Hifil* stem in order to stress Job’s earnest request for their willingness to consider him and his situation. In other words, he is seeking their wholehearted encouragement, concern, and even *hesed*.

Aside from the basic meaning of the verb פָּנָה (“to turn”), there are a number of nuances, one of which is to “pay attention to,” or “consider.” Most of the time, this verb is used with the preposition אֶל in order to express a specific direction, and appears with כִּי as well. It seems there are two possible translations for this clause פָּנֵה־יָיָא: “turn (back) to me!”

²⁹Gordis, 77.

³⁰Hartley, 140.

³¹TWOT, 831.

and “consider me,” or “pay attention to me!” If the first translation, then it’s possible to assume that his friends turned away their faces while Job was requesting them to decide to show their willingness for *hesed* to him. If the second, although it does not express the action of turning their faces back to him, it does stress his sincerity about his righteousness. It also connects smoothly the following clause: “Consider me whether I should lie to your face!” No matter how we deal with this verb, it expresses that he is deeply hurt by his friends, and attests to the fact that he is not lying.

The basic meaning of the verb שׁוּב is to “(re)turn.” *Qere* וְשׁוּבוּ, which is 2mp imperative and refers to his friends, is preferable to *Kethib* וְשָׁבָי, which indicates second feminine singular. וְשָׁבָי is also problematic in terms of its translation. Many English versions leave it un-translated, and some scholars, such as Gary, render it as בִּי, (“in me.”)³²

It is also a bit difficult to determine how to deal with the particle לָוֹד. If we read it together with the preceding verb וְשׁוּבוּ, then “return again” is acceptable. However, as it can also be read with the noun, צִדְקִי־בָהּ, the appropriate rendering would then be, “my righteousness is still in itself.” Despite the different treatments, they are actually not so different from each other. It would be worthwhile to consider Gordis’ suggestion regarding the verb שׁוּב. He reads it as “stop,” or “stay,” because, he insists, its meaning expresses the opposite of “going forward.”³³ In this way, we might render it: “Please stay! Let there be no injustice and stay (with me), my righteousness is still in itself.” I believe both of these readings are acceptable because “staying” can be understood in terms of being in the same space, and of sympathizing with a person. Thus, we can interpret Job’s request for his friends to stay with him as sympathy.

Verse 30 begins with the interrogative statement, “Is there injustice on my tongue?” The prefix (imperfect) form is often given modal force, so we read לֹא־יֵדְעֵן as, “it cannot discern.”³⁴ Generally, the Hebrew noun, הֲנִיָּה, refers to wrong desire and ruin, or calamity. As we consider the preceding clause in parallelism, we can read it, “deceptive words,” as Hartley suggests.³⁵

Conclusion

As a conclusion, I will present some of the insights that, I feel, will help remind us of what main keys for true friendship should be shown to

³²Hartley, 140.

³³Gordis, 77.

³⁴Bonnie Pedrotti Kittel, Vicki Hoffer, and Rebecca Abts Wright, *Biblical Hebrew: A Text and Workbook*, 2nd ed. (London, UK: Yale University Press, 1989), 100.

³⁵Hartley, 142.

those who are suffering. I believe we can enjoy true friendship as they are practiced in our lives.

The Need to Be an Authentic Listener

There seems to be a tendency among Christians to judge others when they express their difficulties, pains, and sufferings by interrupting them. Rather than patiently listening, we simply rush in to solve their problems. The Job 6:14-30 passage shows us just how foolish, and dangerous, that is.

We have seen two possible meanings of the verb פָּנָה in verse 30: “turn back,” or “pay attention to.” As Job finished speaking, he urged his three friends to pay attention to him and consider his situation. (Interestingly, he did not ask them to deliver him from the situation—see vv. 22-23). When those friends first heard about his troubles, they decided to come to sympathize with, and comfort, him (2:11); and their first motivation seemed quite genuine. However, as soon as Job lamented to God about his circumstance, they began to argue with him, their “knowledge and judgment” taking precedence over paying attention to him, or considering his anguish. Later, they had to acknowledge their folly and shame (see Prov. 18:13). So, take heed to what James 1:19-20 says: “My dear brothers, take note of this—everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man’s anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.” One has to be an authentic listener before he is in a position to offer “solutions.”

A Recognition That Words Can Kill One’s Spirit

This passage also instructs us as to the significance of our words, which can make people feel dead inside, and cannot to be taken back once spoken or written. Verses 25-27 describe how much Job was hurt by his friends’ words; and verse 17 (especially the expression “to bargain him over the price of fish”) intensified the tragedy of Job feeling abandoned and abused. “The tongue that brings healing is a tree of life, but a deceitful tongue crushes the spirit” (Prov. 15:4).

The Need to Show *Hesed* (Loyalty), Particularly in One’s Time of Suffering

Verse 14 (the passage’s topic statement) requires us to pay attention to the significance of *hesed*. In the midst of his suffering, Job asked his friends to show their *hesed*. As I mentioned, we read this word “as

loyalty in relation to covenant.” Those friends were supposed to keep their loyalty in order to show true friendship. Unfortunately, they failed to do so. Probably, this loyalty should be understood in connection with Job’s intercessory prayer in the book’s epilogue (42:10). God was angry with the three friends because their words and attitudes were not right (42:7). So, to be restored, God asked Job to pray for them (42:8). After doing so, God restored both Job, and the relationship between God and his friends.

The sum of it all is this: Rather than arguing, and judging Job by their trifling theology about God, his three friends should have been intercessors while sitting together with, and listening to, him. They were to know that “prayer changes things.” As Psalm 107:28 reminds us, “Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble, and he brought them out of their distress.” We have many examples that confirm the power of intercession prayer: e.g., Abraham in Genesis 18, and Moses in Exodus 32:32-34. In good times and bad, in joy and in sorrow, friends have to be present with the same commitment and loyalty. Absolutely, true friendship will be tested in matters of faith, like in Job’s case. Intercessory prayer will attest to that true friendship.

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