

The Wicked in Ambush (Job 27:18–19)

ARON PINKER
SILVER SPRING, MD

Verses 18–19 have been generally understood as referring to the wicked and his demise, or the sudden loss of his wealth. The objective of this study is to clarify the image that the author tried to convey. I suggest that this image is the wicked in ambush of the innocent, a situation often referred to in the Tanach. Job claims that the wicked would not succeed in his entrapment efforts.

Key Words Job 27 18–19, wicked, ambush, hollow of tree, moth, spider

INTRODUCTION

Verses 18–19, reading **בְּנֵה כְּעֵשׂ בֵּיתוֹ וְכַסְּכָה עֲשֵׂה נֹצֵר עֲשִׂיר יִשְׁכַּב וְלֹא יֵאָסֵף עֵינָיו פָּקֶד וְאִינּוֹ**, have been generally understood as depicting metaphorically the ephemeral nature of the houses and wealth that the wicked possesses. For instance, Whybray says:

The houses that they build will be ‘like the moth’ (כְּעֵשׂ), ‘not nests’, a symbol of fragility (cf. 4.19) and will be no more solid than the temporary huts of those who guard the vineyards. Verse 19 expresses the matter with yet another image: the wicked will go to bed wealthy, but when they wake up in the morning their wealth will be gone.¹

However, it is difficult to see the logic in these metaphors and identify the objects of comparison or reference. Obviously, the moth is not a house builder, and the parallelism of “moth” with “booth” is rather strange.² The ducts that some moths bore into the trees, if considered their “houses,” are quite sturdy. But are the dwellings or the builders compared in v. 18? Why didn’t the author simply say **בְּנֵה כְּעֵשׂ בֵּיתוֹ עֲשֵׂה כְּנֹצֵר סָכְתוֹ**? And who is referred to by **וְאִינּוֹ** of v. 19, the wicked, his house, or his wealth?

1 Norman Whybray, *Job* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 120

2 Jehuda Felix, *The Animal World of the Bible* (Tel Aviv: Sinai, 1962), 126–27. Felix notes that there are hundreds of moth (*Microlepidoptera*) varieties in Israel, and all are harmful to plants, fruit, and seed. The real damage is caused by the larvae, which gnaw at all plants and plant-products. A single larva of a borer moth (*Zeuzera pyrina*) can destroy a young tree by boring ducts in the trunk of the tree and splintering the trunk and the branches.

Tur-Sinai notes that:

Previous explanations of this sentence [v. 18] are unsatisfactory; it is not natural to compare the (futile) building of a house with the action of a moth—which eats clothes, not buildings; and, if there were, as D. Yellin thought (see *ad* 1X,9), another word **שַׁעַר** in the Bible, meaning ‘bird’s nest’, a bird’s nest is not a symbol of destruction.³

Moreover, it is rather unlikely that Job would make a self-incriminating statement such as v. 19. Indeed, the impossibility of v. 19 being uttered by Job is one of the reasons portions of his speech are attributed to one of his friends. Finally, Whybray’s understanding of v. 19 does not account for **הָאֵלֹהִים אֵלֵינוּ**.

Commentators have been also challenged by the inconsistency of the description of the wicked. For instance, Andersen observes: “Consistency is not to be sought in the total picture. The wicked man, who already has widows in v. 15 is going to bed in v. 19. . . . MT reads simply ‘and he/it is not’; RSV supplies *his wealth*; but it could mean that he wakes up in the morning to discover that he is dead.”⁴ This would be a rather strange discovery. Moreover, the wicked seems to be dying again in vv. 20b and 21a.

The objective of this study is to clarify the image that the author tried to convey in vv. 18–19. I suggest that this single image is the wicked in ambush of the innocent, a situation often referred to in the Tanach. Job claims that the wicked would not succeed in his entrapment efforts. He might have agreed with his friends that failure is the lot of the wicked, and any success they have is temporary. But this agreement serves only as means for highlighting the injustice of his personal tragedy.

ANALYSIS

Ancient Versions

The Septuagint reads: “(18) And his house is gone like moths, and like a spider’s web. (19) The rich man shall lie down, and shall not continue, he has opened his eyes, and he is not” (18. Ἀπέβη δὲ ὁ οἶκος αὐτοῦ ὡςπερ σῆτες, καὶ ὡςπερ ἀράχνη. 19. Πλούσιος κοιμηθήσεται καὶ οὐ προσθήσει, φθαλμος αὐτοῦ διήνοιξε καὶ οὐκ ἔστι). It renders **הָיָה** as “is gone” (Ἀπέβη δὲ), an unattested sense; **בֵּיתוֹ** as “his house” (ὁ οἶκος αὐτοῦ); and **שַׁעַר** as “like moths” (ὡςπερ σῆτες), but also **שֶׁמֶטְוֶה** as “like a spider’s web” (ὡςπερ ἀράχνη), apparently containing the original and its correction. The Septuagint drastically changes v. 18 by understanding **בָּנָה** in the unattested and contrary sense of “gone, destroyed,” suggesting that the destruction was caused by the boring of moth, translating **שַׁעַר** twice and omitting the second hemistich. Its translation of v. 19 is as literal and opaque as the MT. In v. 19, the Septuagint

3. Naphtali H. Tur-Sinai, *The Book of Job* (Jerusalem: Kiryath Sepher, 1967), 392.

4. Francis I. Andersen, *Job: An Introduction and Commentary* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 1976), 223.

apparently reads לא יִאָסֶף = “shall not continue” (ὁὐ προσθήσει) instead of the MT’s לא יִאָסֶף.⁵ This reading has been adopted by many modern exegetes. The Septuagint did not have the MT’s vv. 18b and 19b. Verse 19b was reconstructed from Theodotion. Duhm observes: “v. 18^b 19^b 21–23 fehlen in LXX und sind in der That sehr entbehrlich, aber wie vieles andere ist nicht minder entbehrlich!”⁶

The Targum’s translation is quite literal. It has “He built as an earth-worm his house, and as a booth that makes a guard of fruit” and “Rich he will die and will not be gathered in, his eyes he opened and is no more” (בנא עתיר ידמוך ולא יתכנש עינוי והיך רקבוביתא ביתיה והיך מטללתא דעביד נטר פרי (פקח וליתוי). The Targum renders כָּעֵשׂ as “as an earth-worm” (היך רקבוביתא), לא יִאָסֶף as “will not be gathered” (לא יתכנש), and ואינו as “and is no more” (וליתוי).

The Peshitta has “For the wicked has built his house as a spider’s web, and like a booth he made his shelter. The rich man shall lie down, but he shall not rise again; he opens his eyes, and he is gone.” It takes כָּעֵשׂ as “as a spider’s web” (איך גוגי), נצר as “his shelter”, לא יִאָסֶף as “but he shall not rise again” (לקום ולא יוסף), adding “rise,” and ואינו as “and he is gone.” The Peshitta understands the metaphors in v. 18 as dealing with inanimate objects (“spider’s web” and “shelter”). It is not clear what significance it attributes to the opening of eyes prior to the final demise.

The Vulgate has “(18) He has built his house as a moth, and as a keeper he has made a booth. (19) The rich man when he shall sleep shall take away nothing with him: he shall open his eyes and find nothing” (*Aedificavit sicut tinea domum suam et sicut custos fecit umbraculum. Dives cum dormierit nihil secum auferet aperit oculos suos et nihil inueniet.*). The Vulgate renders כָּעֵשׂ as “as a moth” (*sicut tinea*); ישָׁכֵב as “when he shall sleep” (*cum dormierit*), which is not attested in the Tanach; לא יִאָסֶף as “shall take away nothing with him” (*nihil secum auferet*); and ואינו as “and find nothing” (*et nihil inueniet*). The Vulgate apparently transposes the two words סכה and נצר to improve the parallelism between the two parts of the verse.

Most of the versions give standard words unattested meanings and somewhat expand the text. It seems as though they found it difficult, within the confines of the MT, to shape a coherent meaning for the verse. In particular, the seemingly self-contradictory v. 19 is not adequately elucidated by the versions.

Classical Jewish Exegesis

Classical Jewish exegesis has been challenged by vv. 18–19 no less than the versions, and consequently it was forced to supplement the text with extraneous input. Rashi (1040–1105), essentially following the Targum,

5 The א/ו confusion is attested in Exod 5 7 (תוספון instead of תאספון), 1 Sam 18 29 (יאסף instead of ויסף), Jer 25 37 (נורת instead of נאות), and, Qoh 10 10, where according to the Mas-sorah, in the land of Israel the reading was לו and in Babylon לא

6 D Bernhard Duhm, *Das Buch Hiob erklärt* (KHC, Tubingen Mohr Sebeck, 1897), 133

translates: “בנה כעש: As the worm a hole, which does not persist, and as the booth that makes a guard of the vineyard and figs, which is not permanent. עשיר ישכב: will die in his wealth and sometimes would not be properly buried.” Because a worm does not intend to make permanent holes and the guard does not intend to build a permanent abode, the metaphor in v. 18 is undermined. Moreover, Rashi’s interpretation anticipates in v. 19a the demise that is stated only in v. 19b. Finally, Rashi’s factual description in v. 19 presents a normal situation, which bodes nothing unusual for the wicked.

While Rashi’s interpretation intends to convey a sense of fragility, Ibn Ezra’s (1089–ca. 1165) aims to project a sense of strength and security. Ibn Ezra capitalizes on Job 9:9, where עש refers to a permanent constellation of stars (Hyades). He explains: “בנה כעש ביהו: so that it would stand, be permanent as the constellation עש, and he put a guard on his house, as a wall, to protect it at night. He will die rich but would not be properly buried, and would disappear though not dead.” Ibn Ezra seems to be omitting the comparative כן וּכְסָדָה. Also, as a general statement of fact, Ibn Ezra cannot be right, though there could have been cases in which proper burial was denied to the wicked, and it was not unusual for the rich to be kidnapped for ransom.

Rashbam (ca. 1085–1174) adopts Rashi’s explanation for v. 18 but connects v. 19 to v. 20 to provide a logical explanation for ולא יאסף and v. 19b. He says: “עשיר ישכב: at night on his bed and would not be buried, because he would be killed at night. In the morning, when he was supposed to open his eyes, he is not there because terror will reach him and a storm wind would carry him away at night.”⁷ Rashbam’s fanciful explanation only highlights the challenges posed by v. 19. Still, Rashbam’s interpretation has been adopted by Qara (end of the 11th century to the first half of the 12th).⁸

Ramban (1194–1270) mentions Rashi’s explanation of v. 18. He notes the explanation that ולא יאסף refers to the inheritance. The children would not be able to collect the inheritance because they would be killed. Verse 19b refers to anyone who can open his eyes. This one would see that the rich person is no longer there, because he was carried away by some terrorizing agent (v. 20). Ramban prefers the interpretation that v. 19 refers to not being afforded a proper burial despite one’s riches. Before his death, the rich man opens his eyes to see if his children would inherit his wealth but finds that all of it was stolen. This interpretation presents a logical contradiction in the timeline of events.

Berechia ben Natronai (12th–13th century) proposed the following original interpretation:

7. Sara Japhet, *The Commentary of Rabbi Samuel Ben Meir (Rashbam) on the Book of Job* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2000), 406.

8. Moshe M. Ahrend, *Rabbi Joseph Kara’s Commentary on Job* (Jerusalem: HaRav Kook, 1988), 78. Qara only changes the understanding of כעש ביהו by suggesting that it means “like a house of spider would be his house.” However, it is difficult to see why עש “moth” would mean the same as עכביש “spider.”

18. *he builds his house as the moth, and 'his trust is as the spider's house' (viii. 14): for his house and his money shall be lost suddenly. 19. The rich lies down, but he shall not be gathered, by his wealth. Or, he shall not be gathered, although he shall not die. He opens his eyes from his sleep, and he is not, for his wealth. This shall be his portion, to be punished in his children and his wealth.*⁹

Berechia suggests that v. 18a expresses the *trust* that the wicked can place in the house that he built to be in the future an asset to him. From this perspective, the house that the wicked built like the moth can be trusted as much as a spider's house. Consequently, v. 18b must provide a rationale for the statement in v. 18a. Berechia interprets v. 18b as stating that the wicked is liable to experience catastrophic losses of property and liquid assets, probably taking נָצַר to mean "what he keeps stashed away." The wicked will lose his house and money as quickly as a booth is destroyed. In v. 19, Berechia apparently understands יִאֲסֶה to express the personal care and attention usually accorded to a person of wealth in life or after he dies. The wicked lies down as a rich man, but would be deprived of the pampering because of the quick change in fortunes. When he opens his eyes in the morning, he has no stature because of his wealth.

It is difficult to anchor Berechia's interpretation in MT. However, it is notable that he, unlike many other exegetes, was sensitive to the fact that taking v. 18b as a colon that is parallel to v. 18a makes the entire verse incomplete. One expects to learn what happens to a house built as a wicked person builds it.

There is relatively little congruence in the explanations that were offered by classical Jewish exegetes. The highly interpretative and singular nature of classical Jewish exegesis is clear indication that the MT was problematic. Unfortunately, despite the interpretative nature of this exegesis, it failed to produce a logical explanation of vv. 18–19.

Modern Exegesis

Modern scholarship assumed that vv. 18–19 deal with the fate of the wicked. The house that he builds would not have permanence (v. 18), and he will suddenly and prematurely die or lose his wealth (v. 19). In v. 18, the comparison in the metaphor is not clear, and in v. 19 the situation referred to is somewhat obscure. Regarding v. 18, Hitzig says: "Weder der Mann selbst noch sein Haus kan mit der Motte verglichen warden."¹⁰ It is notable that "destruction" and "death" are not mentioned specifically in the text. The wicked can be presumed to be enjoying his wealth to the day of his death, though he might die prematurely. On the other hand, v. 19 might be suggesting that the wicked could lose his wealth but continue to live/die.

9. S. A. Hirsch, trans., *A Commentary on the Book of Job by Berechiah ben Natronai* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1905), 182.

10. Ferdinand Hitzig, *Das Buch Hiob übersetzt und erklärt* (Leipzig: Carl Winter, 1874), 199.

A typical modern translation of vv. 18–19 is Driver and Gray's: "18. He builds his house as the spider, And as a booth which the keeper makes. 19. He lies down rich, but does so no more; he opens his eyes, and he is not."¹¹ In this translation, בָּנָה is "he builds." Use of the word בָּנָה was assumed to convey at least an intent and hope of permanence and protection. Driver and Gray say, "The house of the wicked man, however strongly he may build it and however permanently he may intend it to be, it quickly collapses."¹² However, collapse or destruction is not mentioned in the verse. The only verbs used (עָשָׂה, בָּנָה) in the verse convey a sense of continued building.

כַּעֲשֵׂה is "as the spider." This meaning is equivalent to the Hebrew עֲכָבִישׁ (8:14). Because the first and last letter of עֲכָבִישׁ form the word עֵשׂ, it is possible that a scribe spaced out the words in a line by writing the first and last letters of a word and later filled them in. In the case of עֲכָבִישׁ, he might have forgotten to fill in the missing letters.¹³

The reading עֲכָבִישׁ is possible, is supported by Septuagint and Peshitta, and the notion of the cobweb being the spider's house is clearly stated in v. 8:14. This led many modern exegetes to the adoption of the reading כַּעֲכָבִישׁ.¹⁴ However, the reading כַּעֲכָבִישׁ presents an unrealistic image. A rich man would not build his house as a spider's cobweb; not in shape, construction, sturdiness, or function. Ehrlich notes: "Denn בית kann wohl jede Stätte bezeichnen, aber auf die Herstellung des Spinnengewebes past das hier gebrauchte בָּנָה nicht."¹⁵

Some commentators felt that the object of comparison in the two metaphors of v. 18 is the house rather than the builder.¹⁶ Dhorme says: "in conformity with the 2nd hemistich, 'like a hut which a keeper has made', the object of the comparison must be the house, and not its builder."¹⁷ This reasoning leads to the assignation of the meaning "empty bird nest" to

11. Samuel R. Driver, and George B. Gray, *A Critical Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Job* (2 vols.; ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1921), 1:230–31.

12. *Ibid.*, 1:231.

13. Hitzig (*Hiob*, 199) suggests that in 2 Sam 14:13 we have כָּאֵשׁ instead of בְּאֵשׁ; and in 1 Kgs 9:25 אֵה instead of אֵיחָר. It is also possible that the scribe spaced out only the word עֲכָבִישׁ to ascertain that he does not confuse it with עֲכָשׁוּב. Cf. Norman C. Habel, *The Book of Job: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985), 383.

14. So do Septuagint, Peshitta, Sa'adia, Merx, Hitzig, Bickell, Hoffmann, Dillmann, Budde, Baethgen, Duhm, Peak, Strahan, Driver and Gray, Barton, Beer, Hölscher, Fohrer, Terrien, Rowley, Gerleman, Peters, de Wilde, Hartley, and so on. Clines says: "it would be very awkward if the verse were to mean 'he builds, like a spider, his house, and [it is] like a booth [that] a watchman makes" (David J.A. Clines, *Job 21–37* [WBC 18A; Dallas: Word Books, 2006], 659).

15. Arnold B. Ehrlich, *Randglossen zur Hebräischen Bibel, Textkritisches, Sprachliches und Sachliches*, vol. 6: *Psalmen, Sprüche, Hiob* (Hildesheim: Olm, 1968), 288.

16. Konstantin Schlottmann, *Das Buch Hiob* (Berlin: Weigand & Grieben, 1851), 375. Schlottmann, however, thinks that: "Das כ bezeichnet auch hier die Vergleichung ganz im allgemeinen. Schwerlich soll das Haus des Frevelers mit der leicht zerriebenen Motte selbst verglichen werden."

17. Eduard Dhorme, *A Commentary of the Book of Job* (London: Nelson, 1967), 395.

שַׁי, ¹⁸ as the Arabic عُشْن, “bird’s nest in a tree.”¹⁹ For instance, Ehrlich says “Auch hier bezeichnet שַׁי das leere Vogelnest; sieh zu 4,19. . . . Hier kommt selbstredend lediglich die Zerbrechlichkeit die Vogelnestes in Betracht.”²⁰ This perception does not agree with reality. A rich wicked person would not build a fragile house that is like a nest or a booth.

Grabbe’s analysis of שַׁי cognates brings him back to the more traditional meaning “moth.”²¹ He concludes,

Granted, it [“moth”] does not form the more exact synonymous parallelism that Pope’s translation makes, but the imagery is perfectly understandable and hardly to be classified as inferior. It does not appear to strain credulity to consider a moth pupa as an apt figure for fragility. Are we attempting to force the poet into a rut by constantly demanding rigid synonymous parallelism? Unless more solid evidence for an alternative suggestion can be produced, we would seem to have a very usable and intelligible simile in “he builds his home as moth (larva?).”²²

However, commentators struggle to find a proper element for comparing “moth” with “house.” Shlottmann rendered שַׁי by “wie Mottenfraß.”²³ Dillmann says that the metaphor tries to convey the notion that the house is “so leicht zerstörllich, wie das dünne larvenartige Gewebe der Motte in einem Kleide,” which makes no sense.²⁴ Hengstenberg tries to associate “house” with “moth” by explaining, “das Haus das er sich baut, wird so wenig Bestand haben, wie die Wohnung, welche sich die Motte in einem Kleide bereitet.”²⁵ But the moth consumes the *Kleide*, it is not its house.

18 So do Schultens, Delitzsch, Ehrlich, Dhorme, Yellin, G R Driver, Fedrizza, Gordis, Clines, and so on Gordis’s rendition of v 18a, “The house he builds is as frail as a nest,” adds “as frail” (Robert Gordis, *The Book of God and Man* [Chicago University of Chicago Press, 1965], 277)

19 Friedrich Delitzsch, *Das Buch Hiob, Neu Uebersetzt und Kurtz Erklart* (Leipzig Hinrichs, 1902), 144 Delitzsch notes that Akkadian *ašāšu* could mean “moth” or “bird’s nest” Cf CAD A/2, 422, s.v. *ašāšu* A Hitzig (*Hiob*, 199) observes “es ist rem umsonst, wenn Delitzsch von einem Gespinnt, einem kleinen Gehäuse redet, welches die Motte zusammenklebe” Pope argues that “It is unlikely, moreover, that Akk *ašāšu* can be connected with שַׁי because the laryngal ש would have affected the adjacent vowels to produce *ešēšu* Arabic ‘ās, “night watchman,” participle of ‘ass, ‘keep night-watch,’ offers a precise parallel to *nōsēr*” (Marvin H Pope, *Job* [AnB 15, Garden City, NY Doubleday, 1986], 193) Pope’s interpretation is adopted by Habel Clines (*Job 21–37*, 659) says that Pope’s proposal “creates a very close parallel with נָצַר in the second colon, but it would be odd to have a comparison with a watchman in the first colon and with a hut in the second”

20 Ehrlich, *Randglossen*, 288

21 The meaning “moth” was adopted by Umbreit, Schlottmann, Hengstenberg, Dillmann, Hirzel, Noyes, Sicre Diaz, Kissane, Hacham, Andersen, Good, Grabbe, and others

22 Lester L. Grabbe, *Comparative Philology and the Text of Job A Study in Methodology* (SBLDS 34, Missoula, MT Scholars Press, 1975), 91

23 Schlottmann, *Hiob*, 375

24 August Dillmann, *Hiob* (Leipzig Hirzel, 1891), 235 It seems that Dillmann is confusing the larva and pupa stages in the moth’s evolution

25 Ernst W Hengstenberg, *Das Buch Hiob erläutert* (Berlin Schlawis, 1870), 168

Andersen also thinks that 'moth' "could be an example of something fragile (see 4:19)."²⁶ Kissane notes: "As in iv. 19, the moth is the symbol of brief existence."²⁷ However, nowhere in the Tanach is 'moth' associated with fragility or brief existence. In the Tanach, the moth is a symbol of consumption and is often associated with the verb **אכל**.²⁸ A moth is as fragile as many other insects, and its cocoon is sturdy enough to protect it during its pupa stage.²⁹

ביתו = "his house." Hitzig says: "Das Haus, jene Schätze birgt."³⁰ However, it should be noted that **בית** could be "dwelling, abode, habitation, and place of any kind." Kissane suggests that "his house" means all his possessions, his wealth (8:15).³¹ Obviously, "his house" cannot mean "his family, clan."

וכסכה = "and as a booth." Driver and Gray explain that the **סכה** is the "most temporary of human habitations, the booth (Is. 1⁸) or shelter made of boards and matting for the use of watchmen in vineyards or gardens during the summer, which readily falls to pieces in the storms of autumn and winter."³² The **סכה** can be made by anyone, unlike the house that needs professionals for erection.

נצר = "which the keeper," the word "which" being implied. In support of the **נצה-נצר** association, Isa 1:8 is usually quoted.³³ However, the metaphor in Isa 1:8 is obscure. The BHS suggests in Isa 1:8 the reading **נצורה** (from **נצר**), while **נצר** is derived from **נצר**.

עשיר = "rich," i.e., "the wicked rich man." Driver and Gray hold that **עשיר** was placed first in v. 19b for emphasis. Thus, "since *rich*, not *lie down*, is the emphatic idea, the phrase **ולא ירסיף** and **איינו** should refer to it: *he shall no more (be rich); he is not (rich)*."³⁴ Hitzig observes: "dass als Appos. zum Subj. gerade **עשיר** gewählt ist, gibt den nöthigen Fingerzeig."³⁵ Some (Schlottmann, Hengstenberg) take **עשיר** to be the subject. Hengstenberg says: "**עשיר** steht weder hier noch irgendwo in der Bedeutung: der Gottlose."³⁶ The similarity of **רשע** and **עש** may have contributed to this view.

²⁶ Andersen, *Job*, 223, and Norman Whybray, *Job* (Sheffield Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 120

²⁷ Edward J. Kissane, *The Book of Job* (Dublin Browne & Nolan, 1939), 170

²⁸ It is possible that 4 19c should be read **יִרְכָּאוּ מִלְפָּנֵי עֵשָׂם** See in 4 17 **מַעֲשֵׂהוּ**

²⁹ Hahn says "Der Glucksstand des Frevlers hat so wenig Halt, wie das Gewebe einer Motte, das nur berührt zu warden braucht, um zu zerfallen, vgl 8, 14" (Hemrich A Hahn, *Commentar ueber das Buch Hiob* [Berlin Wohlgemuth, 1850], 216) This is an unrealistic depiction of the moth's cocoon, and v 8 14 speaks not about the moth but about the spider

³⁰ Hitzig, *Hiob*, 199

³¹ Kissane, *Job*, 170

³² Driver and Gray, *Commentary*, 231

³³ See, for instance, Dillmann (*Hiob*, 236), Dhorme (*Commentary*, 396), Tur-Sinai (*Job*, 392), and others

³⁴ Samuel R. Driver, and George B. Gray, *A Critical Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Job* (2 vols, ICC, Edinburgh T & T Clark, 1921), 2 188

³⁵ Hitzig, *Hiob*, 200 Hitzig explains v 19 thus "Ueber Nacht kommen Diebe (Jer 49, 9), raffen **עֵשָׂם** **רָבִי עֵשָׂרִי** zusammen (vgl Jes 33, 4), packen em, und beim Erwachen (nucht erst Morgens fruh), macht er mit Schrecken die Entdeckung, dass er bestohlen ist"

³⁶ Hengstenberg, *Hiob*, 168

ישכב = “He lies down.” Ehrlich understands the word in a sense that is less deterministic, “er schickt sich an sich niederlegen.”³⁷ The *yiqtal* ישכב indicates repeated action; it would be difficult to associate it with death. In the Tanach, only וישכב is associated with death; usually in the phrase וישכב עם־אבתו.

ולא יאסף = “does so no more,” adopting Septuagint’s reading ויאסף or ויאסף יוסף.³⁸ The possibility of a word having an extra א or missing a י is well attested in the Kethib-Qere apparatus. In only one case both letters are missing (Job 25:5 has יאהיל for יהיל) and in one case the ו/א confusion occurs and a י is missing (Exod 5:7 has תאספון instead of תוספון). The phrase “does so no more” refers to the wicked and indicates the nonrecurrence of a status element.

Some scholars render לא יאסף “would not be interned.”³⁹ Others understand לא יאסף as “nichts ist noch geraubt.”⁴⁰ Most commentators have perceived the phrase ויאסף as having onerous consequence for the wicked, but Ehrlich sees it as a natural step in the process of lying down: “druckt passivisch das Ende der Handlung aus, das Einziehn der Füsse ins Bett; vgl. Gen. 49, 33.”⁴¹

עיניו פקח = “he opens his eyes,” i.e., the wicked. The verb פקח refers in the Tanach only to the eyes and ears (Isa 42:20). Ehrlich says: “עיניו פקח” ist nicht vom Erwachen zu verstehen, sondern vom Blinzeln mit den Augen. Zum Ausdruck kommt nur das Oeffnen der Augen, weil sich dabei das vorangegangene Schliessen derselben von selbst versteht.”⁴² The phrase can be also understood to refer to the short time that it takes to open the eyes.⁴³ The person that opens the eyes could be the wicked but also any other person who can observe the wicked.

ואינו = “and he is not.” Gray notes that Driver perceived v. 19 as referring to the demise of the wicked.⁴⁴ Eventually, the wicked rich man lies down in his bed for the last time. The next morning, he wakes up to

37 Ehrlich, *Randglossen*, 288

38 So do also Ewald, Dillmann, Duhm, Strahan, Hirzel, Delitzsch, Renan, Driver and Gray, Beer, , Zockler, Dhorme, Barton, Yellin, Holscher, Fohrer, Gordis, Pope, Rowley, Fedrizza, Gerleman, de Wilde, Sicre Diaz, Habel, Hartley, Clines, and others

39 So do Ralbag, Rosenmuller, Gesenius, de Wette, Arenheim, Hengstenberg, Noyes, and others Hahn (*Commentar*, 216) says “Allein die Bedeutung begraben werden, last sich fur נאסף durch keine der beigebrachten Stellen erweisen, indem II Regg 22, 20 אל־קברתיך dabei steht, Num 20, 26 aber an das Versammelt werden in die Holle gedacht werden muss, un Je 57, 1 nur zulässig ist die Bedeutung fortgeraft werden.” Cf Sir 8 6, 16 10 Hufnagel reads יאסף “samlet er” (Wilhelm F Hufnagel, *Hiob* [Erlangen Palmisch, 1781], 192)

40 Friedrich W C Umbreit, *Das Buch Hiob* (Heidelberg Mohr Siebeck, 1824), 262 So also Schlottmann, Eichhorn, Scharer, and others

41 Ehrlich, *Randglossen*, 288–89 Ehrlich translates v 19 “Ein reicher Mann, fangt er an sich niederzulegen und hat noch die Fusse nicht emgezogen, so ist er’s nicht mehr, er blinzelt mit den Augen, und es ist verschwunden” This translation adds “so ist er’s nicht mehr” and assumes incorrectly that “und hat noch die Fusse nicht emgezogen” is expressed in ויאסף

42 *Ibid*, 289

43 Amos Hacham, *איוב ספר* (Jerusalem Harav Kook, 1981), 207

44 So do also Delitzsch, Dillmann, Driver, Hirzel, Dhorme, Rabmowitz and Abrunin, and others

find himself dead (2 Kgs 19:35; Isa 37:36). Barton, citing only 2 Kgs 19:35, claims that "The Hebrews were not averse to such contradictory statements as this line contains."⁴⁵ However, 2 Kgs 19:35 and Isa 37:36 do not claim that one can wake up "to find himself dead." This would have been a self-contradictory claim, and therefore unacceptable. These verses say that those who woke up saw only dead around them. Moreover, Gray observes that "(1) in 20-23 the wicked man is depicted as still alive to experience the bitterness of his fallen fortunes; (2) to continue rich to the last hour of life is rather the privilege (from the standpoint of the current theory of the lot of the righteous and the unrighteous) of the righteous than the fate of the wicked."⁴⁶ This leads him to the conclusion that *אינו* refers to the sudden loss of the wealth that the wicked man accumulated.⁴⁷ However, v. 16 already implies that the wicked would lose his wealth. Thus, Schlottmann observes: "Manche haben zwar das Suffirum in *אינו* auf den vorher erwähnten Reichthum des Frevelers bezogen, aber dies ist an und für sich hart und giebt einen schwachen Sinn."⁴⁸ Ehrlich thinks that *אינו* refers to the house in v. 18.⁴⁹

Cox avoids the apparent contradiction in v. 19 by assuming that it deals with two different situations. He says:

In Verse 19, which is somewhat obscure, he seems to portray the sinner who has grown wealthy by wrong as lying down rich at night, without suspecting that it is for the last time, though it is the last; or as opening his eyes in the morning without suspecting that he shall never open them again, though Death is about to close them for ever.⁵⁰

In this approach, the significance of being rich, or even wicked, is not obvious. The situations described by Cox reflect the basic human condition.

Singular Interpretations

Arnheim understands v. 19 in the following original sense: "Sein Reichthum ist von so kurzer Dauer, daß er nicht einmal so lange Stand halt, bis er zu seinem Vätern bestattet ist. Konnte er noch einmal die Augen auffchlagen: er würde den Reichthum nicht mehr erblicken, den er beim Verscheiden zurückgellassen hatte."⁵¹ This understanding is equivalent to the reading *עשיר ישכב ולא יאסף עשיר לרא עיניו פקח והנה אינו*. Arnheim unrealistically assumes that the wicked enjoys his wealth for only a short time

45. George A. Barton, *Commentary on the Book of Job* (New York: Macmillan, 1911), 224.

46. Driver and Gray, *Commentary*, 1:231. Driver and Gray disagree with each other.

47. So do also Arnheim, Hufnagel, Merx, Hitzig, Duhm, Budde, Gray, Yellin, Tur-Sinai, Hacham, Clines, and so on.

48. Schlottmann, *Hiob*, 375.

49. Ehrlich, *Randglossen*, 289. That *אינו* refers to the house in v. 18 is also the position of Kissane.

50. Samuel Cox, *A Commentary on the Book of Job* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1894), 351.

51. Heymann Arnheim, *Das Buch Job* (Glogau: Prausnitz, 1836), 167.

and soon dies. Even if true, this would imply that the wicked enjoys his wealth during his life and loses it only at his death.

Rabinowitz and Abrunin point to the fact that a booth has greater durability than a spider's house. Thus, if the intent of v. 18 is to convey the fragility of the house that the wicked builds, v. 18b should have had a comparison to something that is even more fragile than a cobweb or equal to it, but not a booth that is more sturdy. This observation leads them to the conclusion that the MT's עש was originally ערש, and the ך dropped out. Rabinowitz and Abrunin note that عَرَشٌ, the Arabic cognate of ערש, means "booth, shed." If correct, then the two cola (vv. 18a and 18b) would clearly be parallel, that is, בנה ביתו כערש would be a variant of כסכה עשה נצר.⁵² They find support in Song 1:16, where they interpret ערשנו רעננה as "our booth is fresh"—made of living vines. This interpretation is unlikely, because the following verse describe the house that they are in as built of cypress and cedar wood. It is difficult to imagine that in such a luxurious house they would have vines growing as in a booth. However, it is possible that ערש is a canopied bed, which looks as a booth.

The Kethib-Qere apparatus attests to only three cases of a missing or extra ך, which are not of the same kind as ערש.⁵³ Rabinowitz and Abrunin mention the pairs שיאון-שריון (Deut 3:9 and 4:8) and דרמשק (only in 2 Chronicles)-דמשק. However, in the cases cited, the ך was not dropped by a scribe, but the same place is called differently. Certainly, it can be shown that in many cases in the Tanach a letter could be missing, and that might be the case with the word עש. While from a text-critical point of view ערש is possible, and the wicked might have built a house that is luxurious as a canopied bed, the metaphor would be still puzzling, and its parallelism with the simple booth would be strange. It does not seem that anyone adopted the explanation of v. 18 that was suggested by Rabinowitz and Abrunin.

Rabinowitz and Abrunin claim that v. 19 describes the wicked as lying down a rich man who is confident about tomorrow. However, when someone (in the house) opens the wicked man's eyes, he is dead. Thus, the belief of the wicked that his wealth would save him from a sudden death is false. The following verses, in which the wicked one is still alive, make this interpretation untenable.

Tur-Sinai is sensitive to the fact that in v. 18 nothing is said about the fate of the house and the booth. This leads him to consider v. 18 as an allusion to an ancient legend. He notes that:

the book of Job in particular acquaints us with remnants of ancient legends which mention עש "the Moth" or עיש in connection with the titans who rebelled against God and on being vanquished were established as stars in the sky (see above, IX, 9). XXXVIII, 32 (see there)

52. A. Z. Rabinovitz and A. Abrunin, איוב (Jaffa: Shushni, 1916), 55–56.

53. The three cases are Jos 8:12 לעיר (Ketib) but לעי (Qere), and Jos 8:16 בעיר (K) but בעי (Q), and 2 Chr 5:12 מחצרים (K) but מחצרים (Q).

apparently refers to the death of the children of עיש, and in parallel thereto מוֹרוֹת which, as explained there, represents Babylonian *maz-zarâti*, = Hebrew ים(נוצר) "watchmen".⁵⁴

In Tur-Sinai's opinion, v. 18 is also an allusion to an ancient legend. It tells how a house and booth built by עש and נוצר were destroyed and their children killed. He says: "The meaning is, therefore: he built his house like that of עש 'the Moth', which was soon destroyed. — and like the booth which the "watchman" made: Which 'the watchman' in the legend built for himself and which, too, was destroyed."⁵⁵ Tur-Sinai's reasoning is a fine example of modern-day Midrash. It seems that no one adopted the explanation of v. 18 that he suggested.

Tur-Sinai's chain of reasoning is also very tenuous in v. 19. He thinks v. 19a sounds like Ps 41: 9b, which is a blurred version of Ps 39:7b. Consequently, he concludes that, in line with Ps 39:7b, we should read in v. 19a as עֲשֹׂר יִשְׁכַּב, "he heaps up riches and gathers them not."⁵⁶ When the wicked wakes up in the morning, his riches are gone. It is difficult to imagine what Tur-Sinai has in mind by "he heaps up riches and gathers them not," and the word עֲשֹׂר is never associated in the Tanach with the verb שִׁכַּב. Indeed, the phrase עֲשֹׂר יִשְׁכַּב is impossible in Hebrew.

Observations

Standard interpretations of vv. 18–19 baffle the reader with their logical implications. Tur-Sinai observes that "Previous explanations of this sentence [v. 18] are un-satisfactory; it is not natural to compare the (futile) building of a house with the action of a moth—which eats clothes, not buildings; and, if there were, as D. Yellin thought, another word עש in the Bible, meaning a 'bird's nest', a bird's nest is not a symbol of destruction."⁵⁷ The reader must believe that a wicked person who is rich (v. 19) would build a house that is as sturdy as a cobweb. He does not see what the second metaphor in v. 18b adds to the first metaphor. He is left with an incomplete thought, because nothing is said about the fate of the house that the wicked has built. One would have expected the author to say that the rich wicked man built a very strong house but did not attain any security. Moreover, the following verse asserts that the wicked would be rich, but in v. 16, amassing of wealth is conditional. If יִשְׁכַּב is a euphemism for dying, then what could יִאֲסֶף or יִסֵּף possibly mean? Rich people had their own family burial lots. When a rich man died, his family could afford to hire professional wailers and mourners for a dignified procession and burial.

54. Naphtali H. Tur-Sinai, *The Book of Job* (Jerusalem: Kiryath, 1967), 392.

55. Ibid. Tur-Sinai finds support for his view in Isa 1:8, where next to the mentioning of Sodom and Gomorrah, we read: "And the daughter of Zion is left as the booth in the vineyard, as the lodge in the garden of cucumbers, as the 'guarded (נוצרה) city.'" Tur-Sinai takes this verse as a reference to the legendary booth and city built by that נוצר.

56. Tur-Sinai, *Job*, 393.

57. Tur-Sinai, *Job*, 392.

Thus, אָסַף cannot mean “have a proper burial,” and the Septuagint’s ἵσῖν cannot mean “again,” implying the possibility of repeated deaths. Finally, the reader is left puzzled by the enigmatic word אֵינְנוּ. To whom does this word refer? Does it refer to the house that the wicked built, to his wealth, or to himself?

In the following section, a new interpretation of vv. 18–19 will be presented. This interpretation, without relying on any consonantal emendations of the MT, resolves all the difficulties that have been identified in current interpretations. The proposed interpretation rests on the similarities between the typical acts of the wicked and those of the moth larva boring into a tree.

PROPOSED SOLUTION

Biblical exegesis uniformly assumes that vv. 18–19 depict the fate of the wicked and his wealth. Analysis of this exegesis clearly shows that it is beset by logical contradictions and contextual incoherence. It seems natural in these circumstances to question the validity of the assumption that underlies the standard interpretations and consider alternative situations that vv. 18–19 might be describing.

The solution I am proposing rests on the assumption that vv. 18–19 form a single image. This perception is supported by the conventional use of verb tenses. Verses 18–19 begin with *qatal* verbs (בָּנָה, עָשָׂה) and are followed by *yiqtal* verbs (יִשְׁכַּב, יֵאָסֵף). Though both verbal forms indicate an action performed in the past, the *qatal* form also indicates that the action was not a single occurrence or an action that occurred several times but that the action is a persistent, continuous activity. This understanding would obviously not agree with the notion that v. 18 describes the house that the wicked built. Thus, v. 18 has to describe a wicked man’s constant activity that involves building. One such activity that is often mentioned in the Tanach is setting up ambushes and traps for the poor and innocent by the wicked.

The proper image for understanding vv. 18–19 is not the inconsistent notion that the wicked builds a fragile house and loses his assets, but instead the wicked sets up an ambush intended to trap the poor, hapless, or innocent but is failing in achieving his goal. This activity is vividly described in Ps 10:8–9:

He lurks in outlying places:	יֹשֵׁב בְּמַאֲרָב חֲצֵרִים
from a covert he slays the innocent:	בְּמַסְתָּרִים יְהַרֵּג נָקִי
his eyes spy out the hapless:	עֵינָיו לְחַלְכֵּה יִצְפְּנוּ
He waits in a covert like a lion in his lair:	יֹאבֵד בְּמַסְתָּר כְּאַרְיֵה בְּסֻכָּה
wants to seize the lowly:	יֹאבֵד לְחַטּוֹף עָנִי
he seizes the lowly as he pulls his net shut:	יִחַטֵּף עָנִי כְּמִשְׁכוֹ בְּרֶשֶׁתוֹ

It seems from 38:40 that the author was familiar with this imagery of the lion hiding behind some growth in ambush.

The metaphor in v. 18a should be understood literally; the wicked behaves as the larva of a wood moth. Typically, moths tend to deposit masses of eggs in the crevices of stone fences, knot holes of old trees, and in hollow trees.⁵⁸ Like the larva of the moth boring into the tree, so the wicked works on hollowing the trunk of a tree and setting up his observation post there. These observation posts are obviously set up only in locations frequented by prey. They require much observation, understanding of behavioral patterns, cunning, and patience. The wicked is continually on the lookout for these opportunities and is ready to invest in them. His continuous engagement in entrapment activities makes the hollow inside the trunk of a tree his house (בֵּיתוֹ). An observation post in the hollow of a tree trunk had obvious advantages; it blended well into the environment and was protected by the trunk all around, except of the entry hole.

Verse 18b explains how this entry hole was hidden with an erect branch as usually used in a booth: "and as a booth he made of branch," reading וְכִסְּהָ עֵשָׂה גִצְרִי. The masculine noun גִּצְרִי, "sprout, shoot" is derived from the verb גִּצַּר, which with its Arabic cognate نَضَرَ means "be fresh, bright, grow green." This noun appears in Isa 11:1, 14:19, 60:21, and Dan 11:7 and only in the singular. Thus, v. 18b tells that a single verdant branch (גִּצְרִי) was used to hide the small entry into the hollow of the tree trunk. It is interesting to note that the Qumran Targum preserves a single word of v. 18 כְּקִטוּחָא, which corresponds to כִּסְּהָ and has been related to "branch."⁵⁹

The proposed emendation of v. 18 requires only a revocalization of a single word but this word aptly completes the setup of the observation post from which the trap could be watched and the entrapment executed. In few words, the author conveyed to his audience, who were familiar with hunting practices, an image of a wicked man who is diligent and skilled in setting up his observation post in the hollow of a tree from which he could trap his prey.

Because v. 19 describes the failure of the wicked in his entrapment efforts, the reference to his wealth (עֶשֶׂר) is inconsequential. On the other hand, the wicked (רָשָׁע) is mentioned in vv. 7 and 13. One would expect the רָשָׁע to be mentioned again in v. 19. It is being assumed here that the original reading was indeed רָשָׁע, but it was reversed by a scribe, who did not understand the hunting scene, into עֶשֶׂר (עֶשֶׂר) and eventually into the *plene* עֶשֶׂר. This critical scribal "correction" has misdirected the exegesis of v. 19 into logical inconsistencies and forced interpretations.

Verse 19, however, continues with the description of the ambush. The wicked lies down in his observation post and patiently waits for his prey to walk into his trap. Job says that this wait is for naught, "and he does not gather" (וְלֹא יִאֲסֹף). The reading וְלֹא יִאֲסֹף instead of וְלֹא יִאֲסֹף is supported by several ancient manuscripts.⁶⁰ This reading makes excellent sense for the

58. Leiland O. Howard, *The Gipsy Moth and How to Control It* (Farmer's Bulletin 275; Washington: Printing Office, 1907), 14.

59. Pope, *Job*, 193.

60. Kennicott 32 has יִאֲסֹף; de Rossi 32 and 380 has יִאֲסֹף; and, the Vulgate reads *nihil secum auferet*.

proposed image. The wicked does not gather his prey in the net or trap. Naturally, the long wait causes the wicked to fall asleep and to open his eyes startled, but still his prey is not there (וַאֲיִנְנוּ).

This image of the wicked failing in his well-planned ambush of the innocent fits the list of the failures in vv. 14–17. The wicked should have prospered having many sons. However, some of his sons perish in battle (v. 14a), and the rest die in a plague (v. 15a). Thus, what should have been a blessing becomes a failure, because now he has to feed widows and descendants (vv. 14b and 15b). The wicked can amass silver and precious garments (v. 16) but would not enjoy his wealth; the righteous and innocent will enjoy the wealth of the wicked (v. 17). It is notable that the word נִקָּה is almost the last word in v. 17. It seems as though the author wanted the reader to keep this word in mind for the following failure, where the wicked invests in a typical scheme for entrapping a נִקָּה but is not successful. The wicked fails because that is his lot: זֶה חֶלְקֵךְ אָדָם רָשָׁע עִם אֵל (v. 13a). Job agrees with his friends that the wicked is doomed to fail; what baffles him is his personal lot as a righteous man.⁶¹

The proposed interpretation of vv. 18–19 eminently fits the context. Moreover, the notion that the wicked constantly conspires to entrap people is also in accord with a number of proverbs (Prov 1:11–13, 16–19; 12:5–6, 24:15; 64:3–7), the Psalmists' view (Pss 17:12, 37:32, 64:3–7, 119:110, 140:5–6, 141:9–10), and Jeremiah bemoaning the duplicity of the wicked (Jer 9:7). Finally, the proposed interpretation of vv. 18–19 preserves the consonantal basis of the MT. Verses 18–19 should be read:

He builds as moth his house:	בָּנָה כְּעֵשׂ בֵּיתוֹ
and as a booth he made of branch:	וּכְסֻכָּה עָשָׂה גִזְרֵךְ
The wicked lies down and he does not gather:	רָשָׁע יִשְׁכַּב וְלֹא יֵאָסֵף
He opens his eyes, and it is not [trapped]:	עֵינָיו פָּקְחוּ וְאֵינְנוּ

This reading can be paraphrased: “The wicked builds his ambush site like the moth in the hollow of a tree, and as in a booth he uses a verdant branch to conceal it. He lies there but does not gather any prey, he awakes from a nap and there is still nothing in his trap.” The wicked is completely frustrated in his entrapping effort.

CONCLUSION

The author of the book of Job seems to have been familiar with various hunting practices. In vv. 18:8–10 he uses trapping methods for a metaphor that describes how the vigorous actions of the wicked are curtailed: “For he is sent into a snare by his feet, and walks onto the toils. A trap will hold on to his heel, a snare grips him. Hidden in the ground is its rope, and the trap to catch him lies on the path.” In v. 36:8b, he uses a hunting metaphor to describe the straits of the poor; the author alludes to a rope

61. The view that the wicked is doomed is axiomatic in Judaism. For instance, Ben Sira says, מפלת רשעים מהר חברה (20:18).

noose that is hidden by covering it with earth; the rope is pulled when the prey steps into the noose. In v. 22:10, he describes the wicked as possessed with fear like that of animals that are suddenly roused by hunters' noise and chased into a convenient capture/killing ground: "Thus snares are all around you, and a sudden fear terrifies you." The proposed solution assumes that vv. 27:18–19 also present a metaphor that is based on a hunting scene.

In the metaphor, the wicked is compared to a hunter that meticulously plans to trap an animal by preparing an observation post in which he could safely stay for a lengthy period of watching. Two similes are used for describing the observation post. It is inside the trunk of a tree, and the space has been bored or carved out like moth larva bore into a tree. The opening in the tree is concealed with a verdant branch in an erect position like it is usually used in a booth. The wicked, as the hunter, is an experienced trapper. He carefully plans his ambush and invests considerable effort to make the entrapment a success. However, the wicked will fail. This does not mean that each ambush set up by the wicked will fail.⁶² Neither Job nor his friends could have been that naive. While expressed in deterministic and categorical terms, any success of the wicked should be understood as not being a permanent net gain.

While Job occasionally points to the well-being and prosperity of the wicked, this was not his main concern. It is not difficult to imagine that Job might have agreed with his friends that failure is the lot of the wicked and any success is temporary. Job, who was convinced that he was righteous, was naturally most concerned with the question "Why do the righteous suffer?" and not with the question "Why do the wicked prosper?" From this perspective, Job's agreement with his friends regarding the wicked serves only as means for highlighting the injustice of his personal tragedy.

62. Verse 16 clearly allows the possibility that the wicked would prosper and be successful.



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