

RADIOSCOPY OF A RESURRECTION: THE MEANING OF *niqq'pû zô't* IN JOB 19:26

JACQUES DOUKHAN
Andrews University

Only those who have brushed with death and/or suffered the bite of pain can dream another vision. Job was one of those individuals. Right there from within his tormented flesh, Job draws this paradox of hope:

"After my skin is destroyed, this I know, . . . I shall see God"
(Job 19:26, NKJV).

In this most common translation,¹ the verb *niqq'pû* is derived from the root *nqp* I (strike off)² and rendered "is destroyed," referring to the skin, thereby suggesting that the seeing of God comes upon the destruction of the body. Other translations derive the verb *niqq'pû* from the root *nqp* II (go around, and so "mark off"), thereby suggesting, on the contrary, that the skin takes shape around the individual. The Vulgate has, "I shall be surrounded by my skin."³ Evidently, the Hebrew is obscure and laden with problems.⁴

1. A syntactical problem: Is the verb "is destroyed" related to "my skin," as this translation suggests, or to "this," as the Masoretic accentuation indicates? And whatever subject is selected, how do we account for the fact that the words do not agree? The verb *niqq'pû* is plural, while its alleged subject, "my skin" or "this," is singular.

2. A semantic problem: The form *niqq'pû* is a *hapax legomenon*;

¹See also the NIV: "And after my skin has been destroyed."

²Theophile J. Meek, "Job 19:25-27," *VT* 6 (1956): 100: "after my skin has been struck off"; cf. Edward J. Kissane, *The Book of Job* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1946): "after my skin is stripped off"; John E. Hartley, *The Book of Job*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 290: "after my skin has been so marred"; and Marvin H. Pope, *Job*, AB (Garden City: Doubleday, 1965), 139: "after my skin is flayed."

³Some relate the verb to "this" (*zô't*); so Robert Gordis, *The Book of Job* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1978), 206: "this has been marked"; cf. J. Gerald Janzen, *Job* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1985), 140: "things will come around to this."

⁴According to Pope: "This verse is notoriously difficult" (147); cf. Norman C. Habel, *The Book of Job, A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985), 293.

therefore, its derivation from the root *nq̄p* is problematic.

3. A theological problem: Is the operation taking place immediately after death, thus supporting the traditional idea of the immortality of the soul? Does it concern the eschatological event of resurrection, which is supposed to occur later, far beyond the time of death? Or does it simply describe an existential experience in the present course of life?

Furthermore, the great diversity of interpretations has clouded the understanding of this passage. According to H. H. Rowley, "It is in this verse that the problems of translation and interpretation are the greatest, and the versions offered by different scholars diverge most widely."⁵ Significantly, after Rowley has given his own translation, "after my skin has been thus destroyed," he comments: "It is difficult to see what this can be supposed to mean."⁶

So, to make sense of this text, either the words are rearranged or they are reconstructed through dubious emendations or identified through hypothetic etymologies.⁷ The diverse interpretations revolve around the three theological questions mentioned above.

So far, most interpretations have proceeded, so to speak, *in vitro*. The word *nq̄p* has not been researched in relation to the surrounding words and sounds. Further, the possible intertextual information, namely, other texts which may point to and hence enlighten our text, have not been explored.

I would like, therefore, to propose an interpretation of these words which would take into consideration not only the directions suggested by the poetic dynamics of the text itself, but also those suggested by another text from Job, which appears to be structurally, linguistically, and theologically related to our text. This is Job 10:8-12.

⁵H. H. Rowley, *The Book of Job*, New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 139.

⁶Ibid.

⁷See, for instance, Edmund F. Sutcliffe, "Further Notes on Job, Textual and Exegetical," *Biblica* 31 (1950): 377-378, who rearranges the order of the words in the MT to read: "And shall my skin be stripped from my flesh, even after I shall see God." Cf. Raymond Tournay, "Relectures bibliques concernant la vie future et l'angéologie," *Revue biblique* 69 (1962): 489-495; so too Jean Lévêque, *Job et son Dieu; Essai d'exégèse et de théologie biblique* (Paris: Gabalda, 1970), 2: 477, 486. See also G. Beer, who suggests (in *BHK*) to read the root *zq̄p* behind the word *niq̄p̄û* (cf. Edouard Dhorme, *A Commentary on the Book of Job*, trans. H. Knight [Nashville: T. Nelson, 1967], 285; Godfrey R. Driver, "Problems in the Hebrew Text of Job," *VT*, Supplement 3 [1955]: 80; Theodor H. Gaster, "Short Notes: Job," *VT* 4 [1954]: 78) and connects the word ^c*orî* (my skin) with ^c*ādî* (my witness) and the word *zō^ot* with ^o*ittî* (with me). For other proposed emendations, see Rowley, 139; David J. A. Clines, *Job 1-20*, WBC (Dallas: Word, 1989), 433-434.

Semantic Directions in Job 19:25-27

A close reading of the literary structure of the passage and an examination of its parallelism reveal connections between words (synonyms) and sounds (assonances and alliterations), thereby indicating semantic directions which must ultimately shed light on the meaning of *nq̄p*. Verses 25 and 26 are organized in a chiastic manner:

- A For I know that my Redeemer lives,
 B And He shall stand at last on the earth;
 B₁ And after my skin is destroyed, this I know,
 A₁ That in my flesh I shall see God, . . .
 A // A₁: *wa²anî yāda^ctî gô^alî hāy*
 ūmib²sārî ²eh²zeh ²elōah

In both, we have the sequence: subject, first person; verb, first person; object (God). *Wa²anî* (I, myself)⁸ relates to *ūmib²sārî* (and from my flesh). In Hebrew anthropology, the flesh (*bāsār*) stands for the living person⁹; thus the word *b²sārî* (my flesh) is often used as equivalent to the word ²*asmî* (myself).¹⁰ This connection is furthermore confirmed in our immediate context, which has in the next line ²*anî* as parallel to *b²sārî*.

- That in my flesh (*mib²sārî*) I shall see (²*eh²zeh*)
 Whom I (²*anî*) shall see (²*eh²zeh*) (Job 19:26-27)

Yāda^ctî (I know) relates to ²*eh²zeh* (I shall see); the pair of knowing and seeing is attested in Job 24:1.¹¹

- B // B₁: *wa²ah²rôn^c al^c āpār yāqûm*
 w²ah²ar^c ôrî niq²pû zô²t

The word “and after” (*w²ah²ar*) relates to “at last” (*wa²ah²rôn*); the phrase *w²ah²ar^c ôrî* (and after my skin) echoes *wa²ah²rôn* (the last) by assonance (²*hr*) as well as by alliteration (a - o). The two words convey the same temporal idea of future: what comes after. It is interesting to notice that the same association of the words ²*ah²rôn* and *gô²ēl* is found in Isa 44:6, where God as the Creator is referred to (see Isa 44:2ff).¹² The word ^c*ôrî* (my skin) relates to ^c*al^c āpār* (on dust) through assonance (on ^c and r/l); here also the two words convey similar ideas, both

⁸Note the emphasis on the subject by its position before the verb (see Gesenius' *Hebrew Grammar* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1910], §142f).

⁹See Gen 6:13, 17, 19; 7:16, 21; Job 34:15.

¹⁰See Gen 2:23, 29:14; 2 Sam 19:13, 14; Ps 102:6; Job 19:20; 30:30, etc.

¹¹Cf. Job 34:32; Prov 24:32.

¹²Cf. Isa 48:7, 13; see Pope, 146.

referring to the human body; note that this association points back to the Genesis story of the Fall (Gen 3:19, 21), where the curse of death—the return to dust (^c*āpār*)—is accompanied by God's action of covering the first human couple with skin (^c*ōr*).

Considering this multiplicity of semantic and phonetic connections between the two lines, we are allowed to search the meaning of *nq̄p* in relation to its possible parallels in the poetic expression. The very fact that the word *niqq̄p̄û* parallels the word *yāq̄ûm* (he shall stand) suggests that its meaning should be searched within the semantic range of "standing up."

Semantic Directions in Job 10:8-12

Within the literary structure of the book as a whole, it is significant that Job 10:8-12 occupies the position which symmetrically parallels our passage in the first cycle of speeches:

A.	The First Cycle	B.	The Second Cycle
1.	Eliphaz (Chaps. 4-5)	1.	Eliphaz (Chap. 15)
2.	Job (Chaps. 6-7)	2.	Job (Chaps. 16-17)
3.	Bildad (Chap. 8)	3.	Bildad (Chap. 18)
4.	Job <-----> (Chaps. 9-10)	4.	Job (Chap. 19)
5.	Zophar (Chap. 11)	5.	Zophar (Chap. 20)
6.	Job (Chaps. 12-14)	6.	Job (Chap. 21) ¹³

Furthermore, the two texts echo each other on a significant number of common words and themes:

In the two passages, Job's relationship with God is expressed through the same intimate expression *yāda^c tî* (I know) concerning God.

I know (*yāda^c tî*) that this was with you (10:13).

I know (*yāda^c tî*) that my Redeemer lives (19:25).

In both passages "life" (*hayyîm*) is attributed to God:

You have granted me life (*hayyîm*; 10:12).

My Redeemer lives (*hay*; 19:25).

In both passages God, named ²*lōah* (10:2; cf. 19:26), is addressed as the Creator and the Savior. In Job 10, God is the one who "delivers" (*massîl*; 10:7) and creates the human being (10:8-9). In Job 19, God is the "Redeemer" (*go²ēl*; 19:25) who will intervene even on dust (19:25).

Both passages refer to dust (^c*āpār*). In Job 10, God will bring back

¹³See Hartley, 36.

“into (²*el*) dust” (10:9); in Job 19, God will stand up “on (^c*al*) dust” (19:25).

The pair “skin and flesh” recurs in both passages, applying to the same person, Job:

Clothe me with skin and flesh (10:11).

And after my skin . . . in my flesh . . . (19:26).

The same demonstrative adjective $z\bar{o}^{\bar{t}}$ (this) is found in 10:13 as well as in 19:26, in both cases in relation to a plural. In 10:13, the plural connotation of $z\bar{o}^{\bar{t}}$ is indicated by its parallel ²*elleh* (these)¹⁴; in 19:26, it is revealed through the plural verbal form *niqq^fp^u* (destroyed?).¹⁵

Among all these verbal correspondences, the echo between the two words *niqq^fp^u* (19:20) and *taqqi²ēni* (10:10) may also be of significance. One cannot for sure establish whether these two words are etymologically or simply phonetically related, but their position within the context of numerous parallels suggests some kind of connection.

In Job 10:10, the word *taqqi²ēni* (curdle) applies to milk which solidifies into cheese:

Did you not pour me out like milk,

And curdle me (*taqqi²ēni*) like cheese.

The same word is used in Exod 15:8 to describe the water which becomes firm in the miracle of the crossing of the Red Sea. And there, also as in Job 10, the language is reminiscent of creation:

And with the blast (*rūah*; cf. Gen 1:2) of your nostrils

The waters (*māyim*; cf. Gen 1:2) were gathered together;

The floods stood upright (*niss^sbū*) like a heap;

And the depths (*t^hôm*; cf. Gen 1:2) congealed (*qāp^fū*)

in the heart of the sea (*yam*; Exod 15:8; cf. Gen 1:10).

The word *taqqi²ēni* of Job 10:10 contains, then, the notions of becoming firm along with the idea of creation and ultimately expresses the idea of something which stands up and becomes a solid reality. If we recognize the echo of *taqqi²ēni* of Job 10:10 in the word *niqq^fp^u* of Job 19:26, we may well conclude that this word conveys also the same ideas of standing up and becoming firm and real. Indeed, as we already observed, it appears there in parallel with the word *qum*, which means “stand up,” an association of ideas attested in Exod 15:8, where the word *qp²* parallels the word *nsb* (stand up).

¹⁴The same parallelism is used in Job 12:9.

¹⁵The plural meaning of $z^{\bar{o}}\bar{t}$ is also found in Job 17:8; cf. 1 Chr 4:33. Gesenius' *Hebrew Grammar* identifies this syntactic form as a *constructio ad sensum*, “where attention is paid to the meaning rather than to the grammatical form” (§145a).

It may even be that the word *niqqpû* in Job 19 is derived from the same root *qp*² of the word *taqpî²ênî* in Job 10. In that case, the word *niqqpû* should be understood with the same idea, "standing up," "becoming firm," a meaning which apparently has been retained in the Targum, which translates "after my skin has swollen" (*de²itt^epāh*).

Morphology

The only problem left concerns the morphology of the word *niqqpû*, which traditionally has been derived from the root *nqp* (I or II) meaning "surround" or "destroy." If the word *niqqpû* is derived from the root *qp*² I suggest that the form is a *niphal* (*niqp^eû*) whose quiescent *alef* has disappeared, as is often the case in verbs *lamed alef* by identification with verbs *lamed he*.¹⁶ As for the *dagesh* in the *qôf*, rather than implying the assimilated *nun* of the root *nqp*, it may be interpreted as a *dagesh forte dirimens*, to make the *shewa* audible.¹⁷

Translation and Theological Interpretation

I propose, then, the following translation of Job 19:26: "And after my skin, all these things will stand up firm and real." This translation is supported by the syntax suggested by the MT, which not only cuts after "my skin" with the disjunctive *dehî*, but also connects the verb "stand up" (*niqqpû*) with the demonstrative adjective "this" (*zô²t*) by means of the *maqgef*. The phrase "all these things" (*zô²t*) refers to the body inside the skin. Job 19 parallels here the metaphorical language of Job 10. In both passages, the apparition of the human being follows two stages: first the skin, the external visible "cloth," then the internal body, "the bones and sinews" (10:11; cf. 19:25-26).

The verb "stand up" refers, then, not only to "all these things" (*zô²t*), but also to "my skin." This is implied in the word "after," which suggests that the "standing up" of the "all these" follows this "standing up" of "my skin." Indeed, Job 19 describes the same process of creation as Job 10; in both passages, the body arises out of a nonexistent stage. In Job 10:9, as in Job 19:25, this stage is referred to as dust (*Āpār*), a designation of death or the nether world.¹⁸ Job's vision of God in the

¹⁶See Gesenius' *Hebrew Grammar*, §75 nn-qq.

¹⁷This phenomenon occurs especially on the emphatic *qôf* (see Gesenius' *Hebrew Grammar*, §20h).

¹⁸See Job 7:21; 17:16; 34:15, etc. Cf. Mitchell J. Dahood, *Psalms I*, AB 16 (Garden City: Doubleday, 1966), note 4 on Ps 7:6; Nicholas J. Tromp, *Primitive Conceptions of Death and the Nether World in the Old Testament* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1969), 32-34, 85-91.

next line does not then exclude the body;¹⁹ on the contrary, it is with his real flesh that Job will see God (Job 19:26b).

The theology which is delineated in this passage does not support the idea of the immortality of the soul, since our text implies the presence of the body, nor does it support the idea of an existential experience, since our text implies death through the reference to dust. We find here, then, a clear expression of the doctrine of resurrection as it will be later developed in "Paul's famous discourse on the topic in 1 Cor 15."²⁰

¹⁹*Mil'sārī* means then "from (with) my flesh" and not "without my flesh" (see Pope, 139).

²⁰Pope, 147.