
JOB 16: 1 Then Job answered,

Job replies to Eliphaz, and through him to all his friends, who, instead of comforting him, had added to his misfortunes; and shows that, had they been in his circumstances, he would have treated them in a different manner, Job 16:1-5. Enters into an affecting detail of his suffering, Job 16:6-16. Consoles himself with the consciousness of his own innocence, of which he takes God to witness, and patiently expects a termination of all his sufferings by death, Job 16:17-22.

JOB 16: 2 "I have heard many such things. You are all miserable comforters!"

Verse 2

I have heard many such things - These sayings of the ancients are not strange to me; but they do not apply to my case: ye see me in affliction; ye should endeavor to console me. This ye do not; and yet ye pretend to do it! Miserable comforters are ye all.

JOB 16: 3 Shall vain words have an end? Or what provokes you that you answer?

Verse 3

Vain words - Literally, words of air.

What emboldeneth thee - Thou art totally ignorant of the business; what then can induce thee to take part in this discussion?

JOB 16: 4 I also could speak as you do. If your soul were in my soul's place, I could join words together against you, and shake my head at you,

Verse 4

I also could speak - It is probably better to render some of these permissives or potential verbs literally in the future tense, as in the Hebrew: I also Will speak. Mr. Good has adopted this mode.

If your soul were in my soul's stead - If you were in my place, I also could quote many wise sayings that might tend to show that you were hypocrites and wicked men; but would this be fair? Even when I might not choose to go farther in assertion, I might shake my head by way of insinuation that there was much more behind, of which I did not choose to speak; but would this be right? That such sayings are in memory, is no proof that they were either made for me, or apply to my case.

JOB 16: 5 but I would strengthen you with my mouth. The solace of my lips would relieve you.

Verse 5

I would strengthen you with my mouth - Mr. Good translates thus: - "With my own mouth will I overpower you,

Till the quivering of my lips shall fail;" for which rendering he contends in his learned notes. This translation is countenanced by the Septuagint, Syriac, and Arabic versions.

JOB 16: 6 "Though I speak, my grief is not subsided. Though I forbear, what am I eased?"

Verse 6

Though I speak - But it will be of no avail thus to speak; for reprehensions of your conduct will not serve to mitigate my sufferings.

JOB 16: 7 But now, God, you have surely worn me out. You have made desolate all my company.

Verse 7

But now he hath made me weary - The Vulgate translates thus: - Nunc autem oppressit me dolor meus; et in nihilum redacti sunt omnes artus mei; "But now my grief oppresses me, and all my joints are reduced to nothing." Perhaps Job alluded here to his own afflictions, and the desolation of his family. Thou hast made me weary with continual affliction; my strength is quite exhausted; and thou hast made desolate all my company, not leaving me a single child to continue my name, or to comfort me in sickness or old age. Mr. Good translates: - "Here, indeed, hath he distracted me;

Thou hast struck apart all my witnesses."

JOB 16: 8 You have shriveled me up. This is a witness against me. My leanness rises up against me. It testifies to my face.

Verse 8

Thou hast filled me with wrinkles - If Job's disease were the elephantiasis, in which the whole skin is wrinkled as the skin of the elephant, from which this species of leprosy has taken its name, these words would apply most forcibly to it; but the whole passage, through its obscurity, has been variously rendered. Calmet unites it with the preceding, and Houbigant is not very different. He translates thus: - "For my trouble hath now weakened all my frame, and brought wrinkles over me: he is present as a witness, and ariseth against me, who telleth lies concerning me; he openly contradicts me to my face." Mr. Good translates nearly in the same way; others still differently.

JOB 16: 9 He has torn me in his wrath, and persecuted me. He has gnashed on me with his teeth. My adversary sharpens his eyes on me.

Verse 9

He teareth me in his wrath - Who the person is that is spoken of in this verse, and onward to the end of the fourteenth, has been a question on which commentators have greatly differed. Some think God, others Eliphaz, is intended: I think neither. Probably God permitted Satan to show himself to Job, and the horrible form which he and his demons assumed increased the misery under which Job had already suffered so much. All the expressions, from this to the end of the fourteenth verse, may be easily understood on this principle; e.g., Job 16:9: "He (Satan) gnasheth upon me with his teeth; mine enemy sharpeneth his eyes upon me." Job 16:10: "They (demons) have gaped on me with their mouth; - they have gathered themselves together against me." Job 16:11: "God hath delivered me to the ungodly, (עויל avil, to the Evil One), and turned me over into the hands of the wicked." He hath abandoned me to be tortured by the tempter and his host. If we consider all these expressions as referring to Job's three friends, we must, in that case, acknowledge that the figures are all strained to an insufferable height, so as not to be justified by any figure of speech.

JOB 16: 10 They have gaped on me with their mouth. They have struck me on the cheek reproachfully. They gather themselves together against me.

JOB 16: 11 God delivers me to the ungodly, and casts me into the hands of the wicked.

JOB 16: 12 I was at ease, and he broke me apart. Yes, he has taken me by the neck, and dashed me to pieces. He has also set me up for his target.

JOB 16: 13 His archers surround me. He splits my kidneys apart, and does not spare. He pours out my gall on the ground.

Verse 13

His archers compass me - רביו rabbaiv "his great ones." The Vulgate and Septuagint translate this his spears; the Syriac, Arabic, and Chaldee, his arrows. On this and the following verse Mr. Heath observes: "The metaphor is here taken from huntsmen: first, they surround the beast; then he is shot dead; his entrails are next taken out; and then his body is broken up limb by limb."

JOB 16: 14 He breaks me with breach on breach. He runs on me like a giant.

JOB 16: 15 I have sewed sackcloth on my skin, and have thrust my horn in the dust.

Verse 15

I have sewed sackcloth - שק sak, a word that has passed into almost all languages, as I have already had occasion to notice in other parts of this work.

Defiled my horn in the dust - The horn was an emblem of power; and the metaphor was originally taken from beasts, such as the urus, wild ox, buffalo, or perhaps the rhinoceros, who were perceived to have so much power in their horns. Hence a horn was frequently worn on crowns and helmets, as is evident on ancient coins; and to this day it is an appendage to the diadem of the kings and chiefs of Abyssinia. In the second edition of Mr. Bruce's Travels in Abyssinia, vol. viii., plates 2 and 3, we have engravings of two chiefs, Kefla Yasous, and Woodage Ashahel, who are represented with this emblem of power on their forehead. Mr. Bruce thus describes it: "One thing remarkable in this cavalcade, which I observed, was the head dress of the governors of provinces. A large broad fillet was bound upon their forehead, and tied behind their head. In the middle of this was a horn, or a conical piece of silver, gilt, about four inches in length, much in the shape of our common candle extinguishers. This is called kirn, or horn; and is only worn in reviews, or parades after victory. This, I apprehend, like all others of their usages is taken from the Hebrews; and the several allusions made in Scripture to it arise from this practice. 'I said unto the fools, Deal not foolishly; and to the wicked, Lift not up the horn.' 'Lift not up your horn on high, speak not with a stiff neck; for promotion cometh not,' etc. 'But my horn shalt thou exalt like the horn of a unicorn.' 'And the horn of the righteous shall be exalted with honor.' And so in many other places throughout the Psalms." In a note on the same page we have the following observation: "The crooked manner in which they hold their neck when this ornament is on their forehead, for fear it should fall forward, perfectly shows the meaning of 'Speak not with a stiff neck when you hold the horn on high (or erect) like the horn of the unicorn.'" - Bruce's Travels, vol. iv., p. 407. Defiling or rolling the horn in the dust, signifies the disgrace or destruction of power, authority, and eminence. Mr. Good translates, I have rolled my turban in the dust, which he endeavors to justify in a long note. But in this, I think, this very learned man is mistaken. The Hebrew קרן keren is the same as the Ethiopic kirn, and both mean exactly, in such connection, what Mr. Bruce has noticed above. The horn on the diadem is the emblem of power, authority, and eminence.

JOB 16: 16 My face is red with weeping. Deep darkness is on my eyelids.

Verse 16

On my eyelids is the shadow of death - Death is now fast approaching me; already his shadow is projected over me.

JOB 16: 17 Although there is no violence in my hands, and my prayer is pure.

Verse 17

Not for any injustice - I must assert, even with my last breath, that the charges of my friends against me are groundless. I am afflicted unto death, but not on account of my iniquities.

Also my prayer is pure - I am no hypocrite, God knoweth.

JOB 16: 18 "Earth, don't cover my blood. Let my cry have no place to rest.

Verse 18

O earth, cover not thou my blood - This is evidently an allusion to the murder of Abel, and the verse has been understood in two different ways:

1. Job here calls for justice against his destroyers. His blood is his life, which he considers as taken away by violence, and therefore calls for vengeance. Let my blood cry against my murderers, as the blood of Abel cried against Cain. My innocent life is taken away by violence, as his innocent life was; as therefore the earth was not permitted to cover his blood, so that his murderer should be concealed, let my death be avenged in the same way.

2. It has been supposed that the passage means that Job considered himself accused of shedding innocent blood; and, conscious of his own perfect innocence, he prays that the earth may not cover any blood shed by him. Thus Mr. Scott: - "O earth, the blood accusing me reveal;

Its piercing voice in no recess conceal."

And this notion is followed by Mr. Good. But, with all deference to these learned men, I do not see that this meaning can be supported by the Hebrew text; nor was the passage so understood by any of the ancient versions. I therefore prefer the first sense, which is sufficiently natural, and quite in the manner of Job in his impassioned querulousness.

JOB 16: 19 Even now, behold, my witness is in heaven. He who vouches for me is on high.

Verse 19

My witness is in heaven - I appeal to God for my innocence.

JOB 16: 20 My friends scoff at me. My eyes pour out tears to God,

Verse 20

My friends scorn me - They deride and insult me, but my eye is towards God; I look to him to vindicate my cause.

JOB 16: 21 that he would maintain the right of a man with God, of a son of man with his neighbour!

Verse 21

O that one might plead - Let me only have liberty to plead with God, as a man hath with his fellow.

JOB 16: 22 For when a few years have come, I shall go the way of no return.

Verse 22

When a few years are come - I prefer Mr. Good's version: - "But the years numbered to me are come.

And I must go the way whence I shall not return."

Job could not, in his present circumstances, expect a few years of longer life; from his own conviction he was expecting death every hour. The next verse, the first of the following chapter, should come in here:

My breath is corrupt, etc. - He felt himself as in the arms of death: he saw the grave as already digged which was to receive his dead body. This verse shows that our translation of the twenty-second verse is improper, and vindicates Mr. Good's version.

I Have said on Job 16:9 that a part of Job's sufferings probably arose from appalling representations made to his eye or to his imagination by Satan and his agents. I think this neither irrational nor improbable. That he and his demons have power to make themselves manifest on especial occasions, has been credited in all ages of the world; not by the weak, credulous, and superstitious only, but also by the wisest, the most learned, and the best of men. I am persuaded that many passages in the Book of Job refer to this, and admit of an easy interpretation on this ground.