

Introduction

Grammatical Type: vb hitp.

Occurrences: Total 2x OT, 0x Sir, 0x Qum, 0x inscr.

Text doubtful:

A.1 [nil]

B.1 Various emendations have been proposed for Jb 19.20 in order to make better sense of the verse, including some imaginative conjectures for emending the verb מלט. Duhm proposes the reading וַיִּתְמַלְטוּ שְׁנֵי ‘and my teeth have fallen out’ (1897:100-01), although this does not make any particular sense in the context. Pope has ‘my teeth drop from my gums’ (³1973:139, 143).

B.2 Other suggestions involve the inclusion of עֲצָמֵי ‘my bones’ in the second half of the verse (requiring the movement of the *waw* from the verb to this noun). Kissane, for example, reads עֲצָמֵי הִתְמַלְטוּ בְּשֵׁנַיִם ‘my bones protrude in sharp points’ (1939:115). De Wilde’s emendation (1981:211) requires the changing of many of the words in the verse and does not concur with the reasons for Job’s desertion by his friends. He reads ‘and my bones are full (תִּמְלֵאנָה) of the wrath (בְּעִיר) of the Almighty (שְׁדֵי)’.

Qere/Ketiv: none.

1. Root and Comparative Material

A.1 [See מלט niph'al]

B.1 In trying to make sense of Jb 19.20 several commentators have proposed interpreting מלט as being from a different root than ‘to escape’. It has, therefore, been proposed that one should interpret the verb as meaning ‘to be bald’, a conjectured root derived from the Arb *malāṭa* (cf. Heb מרט) ‘to be bald’, the Geez ‘abkratzen, abstreifen’ (Dillmann:154) and the Tigre *malāṭa* ‘to render bare’ (Littmann & Höfner 1958:110a) (Michaelis 1792:1512 [cf. 1773:39], Fohrer:307-08, Fedrizzi:156-57, HAL:558, Hubbard 1997:953). The interpretation of the verse would then perhaps be that the ‘skin of the teeth’ is the flesh covering the teeth and this is made ‘bald’. It is often interpreted as meaning that his lips or cheeks are emaciated or that he has pulled out his facial hair (cf. Symmachus, Versions A.2). In addition to the fanciful nature of the interpretation required, on linguistic grounds this reading seems unlikely. As there already exists the verb מרט in Heb, which has cognates in various Semitic languages (see B.2), it seems less probable that we should infer in this verse a second root with the same meaning without further attestation in Heb. This conjectured root is not accepted by Alden (1997:954, contradicting what is said by Hubbard 1997:953).

B.2 The root *mlṭ* may be attested in the noun מְלֵט ‘mortar, cement’ (BDB:572) and from this Tur-Sinai has proposed that the verb מלט should be translated ‘to stick’ (1957:301). He draws a comparison with the Syr noun *mlṭ*, an Arb noun *malṭa* and an Arb verb *malāṭa* ‘to join (with cement)’. This would then provide a semantic parallelism with the verb דָּבַק in the first half of the verse, as noted by Doederlein, who suggests that Job’s teeth would have fallen out had they not been held in place by the skin (1779:29). Tur-Sinai interprets the verse, “I cleave to the skin of my teeth (with my tongue) as if by means of cement, so that I am no longer able to speak”. The problem

with such an interpretation is that Job is able to continue speaking and his mouth does not appear to be stuck together. Also מִלֵּט only appears once in the OT (Jr 43.9) and in that instance it may mean ‘loamy soil’ rather than ‘cement’ (HAL:558; Kutsch 1982:476). Habel finds the interpretation of מִלֵּט as meaning ‘to stick’ appealing (1985:292), but concedes that the allusion to escape in the prologue (Jb 1.15–18) makes it more likely that the meaning ‘to escape’ should be retained in 19.20 (although the prose and verse sections may derive from different sources).

B.3 An alternative interpretation of Jb 19.20 is that the root of מִלֵּט here means ‘to gnaw’. This would then be cognate with Akk *marātu* ‘to rub’, Arb *marāṭa* ‘to pluck out hair, to grow’, Syr *mraṭ* ‘to pluck out’, Eth *malaṭa* ‘to pluck out hair’ (Driver 1955:80; BHS). Driver considers the interchange of the letters l and r as a frequent feature in the Semitic languages.

2. Formal Characteristics

A.1 [See מִלֵּט niphāl]

B.1 [nil]

3. Syntagmatics

A.1 The subject of the verb מִלֵּט hitpael is אֵשׁ בְּיַדְדֵי אֲשׁוּרָה ‘sparks of fire’ (Jb 41.11). The speaker at Jb 19.20 (Job) is the subject.

A.2 The verb מִלֵּט hitpael is connected to the syntagm שָׁנִי בְּעוֹר שָׁנִי (Jb 19.20).

B.1 [nil].

4. Versions

a. LXX: διαρριπτέω (Jb 41.11); ἐγκαταλείπω (Theodotion Jb 19.20); ἔχω passive (?Jb 19.20); ἐκτίλλω (Symmachus Jb 19.20); σῶζω (Aquila Jb 19.20).

b. Peshitta: *plṭ* (Jb 19.20); *mtlhtyn* (Jb 41.11);

c. Targum: אַשְׁתִּירִית (root אַשׁ: Jb 19.20); מִשְׁתּוֹבֵן (Jb 41.11); רַטַּט (Qum Tg XXXVI 5 = Jb 41.11).

d. Vulgate: *derelinquo* (Jb 19.20); *accensae* (? Jb 41.[10]11);

A.1 The LXX to Jb 19.20 renders מִלֵּט hitpael by the verb ἔχω and reads ἡ ὀστέων ‘my bones’ as part of the second half of the verse, resulting in the peculiar translation ‘and my bones are contained in teeth’. Aquila (ἐσώθην ‘I am saved’) and Theodotion (ἐγκατελείφθην ἀπό ‘I am left as a remnant from’; cf. Tg, Vg) appear to render the Hebrew more accurately. The verb ἐγκαταλείπω (187x LXX) can denote being left behind as a remnant (e.g. Is 1.8; cf. the noun ἐγκατάλειμμα ‘remnant’) and this suggests a connection with the meaning of מִלֵּט.

A.2 Symmachus translates Jb 19.20 as ἐξέτιλλον τὸ δέρμα μου ὀδοῦσιν ἔμοις ‘and I stripped bare my skin with my teeth’. He, therefore, appears to render the verb by the meaning ‘to make bare’, as have some modern scholars (see Root and Comparative Material B.1). Clines (1989:432) invites comparison with the Phoenician inscription of Kilamuwa (Torrey 1915–17:365; cf. Dahood 1960:404–405) and notes the imagery of eating one’s flesh in Jb 19.22; Is 49.26 and Jr 19.9. Clines adds, however, that it is extremely doubtful whether hunger is the theme of the verse here.

A.3 The verb רטט ‘to shake’ in the Qumran targum to Job is also found in the same text at col. XXXIII 2 on Jb 39.21 and probably has the meaning here of ‘to leap’, ‘bondir’ (van der Ploeg & van der Woude 1971:82).

B.1 [nil]

5. Lexical/Semantic Field(s)

A.1 [See נצל].

A.2 מלט hitpael is found in parallelism with the verb הִלָּךְ + מָן (Jb 41.11).

B.1 [nil]

6. Exegesis

A.1 In a similar manner to the hiphil of מלט being restricted to the book of Isaiah and a Qumran text modelled on Isaiah (1QH XI 9), so the hitpael is restricted to the one book, Job. Perhaps these particular verbal forms were rare and were preferred by these authors for their poetic style. The hitpael does, nevertheless, appear in RH (unlike the hiphil) with the meaning ‘to be saved, escape’ (Yalqut to Dt 854; Jastrow:789).

A.2 The interpretation of the meaning of the hitpael stem in the case of מלט is difficult. At Jb 19.20 it may be simply passive, although a reflexive nuance is also possible (cf. JM:§ 53 i). At Jb 41.11 it probably has the sense of the Greek Middle (as with פָּרַק in Ex 32.3) ‘to bring oneself into safety’. It has been argued that the hitpael may have a durative sense in some instances (Speiser 1955:118–21), and although this sense is possible for the cases of מלט it is not necessary.

A.3 The interpretation of מלט hitpael at Jb 41.11 is not problematic. It denotes the ‘escape’ of sparks from the jaws of Leviathan (BDB:572; HAL:558 – ‘hervorsprühen’). The verb, therefore, may denote a movement out or away from something. It has perhaps been chosen as a more vivid and poetical term, used as it is as the second member in parallelism with the more prosaic הִלָּךְ. Alternatively, as seems to be the case with the niphil מלט, which always comes second after the verbs נָס (1Sm 19.10; 30.17) and בָּרַח ‘to flee’ (1Sm 19.12, 18; 22.20), as well as הִלָּךְ (1Sm 22.1), מלט hitpael at Jb 41.11 may denote a more completed action ‘to reach safety’ following the more general lexeme denoting movement (away from).

A.4 Jb 19.20 is a difficult verse to interpret, and the problems have led to the many different rendering of the verb מלט hitpael. It is problematic that Job should in this verse be concerned about his physical welfare when he has been speaking of his isolation from his fellow human-beings. In particular to say that he has escaped does not appear to be consistent with his experiences at this point. Since the teeth are one of the few parts of the body without skin, it is likely that some irony is intended in this verse (Clines 1989:450). The interpretation offered by Clines seems to be the most reasonable (1989:452; other interpretations are given by him on p. 431). Job has suffered to such an extent that the only thing he has ‘escaped’ from is death itself, which in his condition is hardly an escape at all (a Pyrrhic victory). He has been delivered ‘with (= ב) the skin of his teeth’, but since his teeth have no skin, he implies that he has escaped with nothing (perhaps using the image of having been flayed alive).

A.5 BDB (572) renders the verb מלט hitpael at Jb 19.20 by ‘to escape’. Its interpretation of the verse is that only Job’s gums are left unattacked by leprosy.

B.1 [nil]

7. Conclusion

The verb מלט hitpael denotes a movement out of something. It may be used specifically of ‘escaping’ (Jb 19.20), but also perhaps more generally of ‘coming out’ (Jb 41.11), if the verb is not used as a particularisation of the movement outwards. There may be some reflexive force in the choice of the hitpael in each instance, although it may be significant that the hitpael of מלט is to be found in only one book. It does, however, appear in RH.

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