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The Language of Pain in Biblical Hebrew:
A Lexical Analysis

By
Emma Ford

A Project Submitted to
the Faculty of Covenant Theological Seminary
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Theology.

Saint Louis, Missouri

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Third, the results of the semantic and lexical field analysis from Chapters 2 and 3 are applied in Chapter 4 to a specific passage (Gen 3:16) where the meanings of two of the terms in this semantic field (עֲצָב, עֲצִבוֹן) are debated. After three main interpretive approaches to this passage are described and evaluated, it becomes clear that much of the debate surrounding this passage has stemmed from an improper use of lexicography. An alternative interpretation of Gen 3:16 is then proposed in light of the lexical work in Chapters 2 and 3. In the process, it is suggested that a proper use of lexicographical and lexical field analysis, as found in the earlier chapters of this thesis, can provide a better foundation for interpreting this debated passage and can resolve some of the perceived difficulties. This discussion of Gen 3:16 thus demonstrates the fruitfulness of careful lexical study of these terms and of semantic field analysis for biblical interpretation of passages that speak of pain. This thesis concludes by suggesting that the lexical analysis of these terms for pain can shed light not only on Gen 3:16 but also on other biblical passages that use this language, thus opening the door for further research into such texts.

To Logan,

and in loving memory of my grandmother, Donna Cothran (1939–2025)

Life is pain, highness. Anyone who says differently is selling something.

— Wesley, in *The Princess Bride*.

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Abbreviations

All abbreviations follow those found in *The SBL Handbook of Style*, 2nd ed. (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014). Listed below is an abbreviation not found in the *SBL Handbook*.

Ges¹⁸

Gesenius, Wilhelm. *Hebräisches und Aramäisches Handwörterbuch über das Alte Testament*. Edited by Rudolf Meyer, Udo Rüterswörden, Johannes Renz, and Herbert Donner. 18th ed. Berlin: Springer Verlag, 2013.

Chapter 1

Introduction

How does biblical Hebrew speak of pain? A brief survey suggests there is not a simple answer to this question. On the one hand, there are a number of somewhat abstract Hebrew terms denoting “pain,” “distress,” or “affliction” broadly. On the other hand, in poetical books—and specifically portions of Scripture such as Job, Psalms of lament, and Lamentations—vivid imagery and metaphorical language are frequently used to speak of pain rather than these abstract terms. In narratives too, concrete descriptions of physical or psychological distress are often found without the use of any specific pain terminology.¹ In these and other places, painful experiences may be inferred by the audience without the author’s use of any explicit vocabulary for “pain.” Additionally, there are various more concrete terms that also do not explicitly mean “pain” but designate experiences that could probably be considered painful, such as injuries, wounds, or weariness. This thesis will seek to explore one aspect of this language for pain in the Hebrew Bible, namely, the use of specific terms for pain.

¹ Saul Olyan offers the example of Neh 13:25, in which “Nehemiah attacks his opponents in a judicial setting, cursing them, striking some of them, pulling out their hair and forcing them to swear an oath against intermarriage.” Olyan goes on to note that “although no vocabulary of pain is utilized in the description and nothing is said of the reactions of the opponents, it is obvious that Nehemiah has imposed severe bodily pain on them, given the description of his physically violent, punitive acts” (Saul M. Olyan, “Approaches to the Study of Pain in Ancient Texts,” in *Pain in Biblical Texts and Other Materials of the Ancient Mediterranean*, ed. Michaela Bauks and Saul M. Olyan, FAT 2 [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2021], 6).

Literature Review: Pain in the Old Testament

Apart from a monograph published in 1955 by Josef Scharbert, the topic of pain in the OT and specifically the language of pain in the OT have received little attention in the field of biblical studies. Recent years, however, have seen a rise in scholarly interest in the topic of pain in the Bible and specifically the OT. This growing interest, combined with the lack of extensive scholarly research, suggests that there is much fertile ground for study in this field.

Josef Scharbert

In 1955, German OT scholar Josef Scharbert published a monograph on the topic of pain in the OT entitled *Der Schmerz im Alten Testament*. While several studies on the problem of suffering already existed, Scharbert notes that little attention had been paid in such studies to “the subjective side of suffering, namely, the experience of pain, which is what gives suffering its decisive meaning for religious life.”² According to Scharbert, these studies had primarily treated pain as a theological problem, and none of these studies had dealt in depth with psychology—“with the question of what the OT person actually perceives as suffering, how he feels it, how he behaves in the face of suffering and pain, what influence pain has on religious life.”³ Even fewer of these studies explored the terminology found in the OT for pain, grief, or suffering.

² Josef Scharbert, *Der Schmerz im Alten Testament* (Bonn: Peter Hanstein Verlag G.M.B.H., 1955), 13; “die subjektive Seite des Leidens, das Erlebnis des Schmerzes nämlich, wodurch das Leiden ja erst seine entscheidende Bedeutung für das religiöse Leben erhält.”

³ Scharbert, *Schmerz*, 14; “mit der Frage, was der Mensch des AT überhaupt als Leiden empfindet, wie er es empfindet, wie er sich bei Leid und Schmerz verhält, welchen Einfluß der Schmerz auf das religiös Leben hat.”

In contrast to these previous studies on the problem of suffering, Scharbert seeks to focus more closely on pain (*Schmerz*) rather than suffering (*Leiden*), though he admits that distinguishing between the two is not always an easy task. Scharbert looks at both physical and mental pain in his monograph, but suggests that these two types of pain “were not kept apart in the OT.”⁴ Alongside this focus on pain rather than suffering more broadly, Scharbert’s work contributed to the conversation by providing a treatment of the vocabulary for pain and the psychology of pain in the OT, areas which the previous studies he references had not attempted or dealt with in depth.⁵ Even while he advances the conversation by looking more closely at the OT terminology and psychology of pain, Scharbert’s primary objective appears to be similar to the earlier studies he mentions, as he ultimately concludes with a theological treatment of the problem of pain in the final section of his book.⁶ His results and theological conclusions, he admits, largely correspond to those of the previous studies on the problem of suffering.

Of particular interest here is Scharbert’s section on the language of pain. Scharbert conducts what he calls a “detailed linguistic-philological study” of Hebrew words for pain, grief, and similar words.⁷ In his linguistic study, Scharbert deals with a

⁴ Scharbert, *Schmerz*, 14; “diese beiden Arten von Schmerz werden im AT nicht auseinandergehalten.”

⁵ As one reviewer notes, “the special value of [Scharbert’s] work,” which “justifies its place side by side with the various existing treatments of the problem of suffering in the Old Testament,” lies in “the thorough investigations” in Scharbert’s section on the language of pain in the OT (A. Weiser, review of *Der Schmerz im Alten Testament*, by Josef Scharbert, *Journal of Semitic Studies* 2, no. 3 [July 1957]: 289).

⁶ Scharbert’s book contains three main sections: 1. Pain in the Language of the OT; 2. The Psychology of Pain in the OT; and 3. Pain as a Theological Problem.

⁷ Scharbert, *Schmerz*, 16–17.

variety of terms, grouped by their associations with different life situations.⁸ Scharbert's ultimate goal in studying the linguistic expressions of pain in the OT seems to be to discover the underlying psychological views about pain that OT Israelites held—that is, he is attempting to study the concept of pain by studying the vocabulary of pain. While Scharbert's linguistic study examines many important Hebrew terms for various forms of pain, it also demonstrates a number of methodological problems. First, there are numerous questions that arise regarding his process of choosing terms for analysis.⁹ Second, Scharbert's lexical analysis exhibits an overreliance on etymology in determining the meaning of certain Hebrew words.¹⁰ Third, the belief that Hebrew thought and language are primarily concrete rather than abstract significantly shapes his analysis; Scharbert's conclusions about the terms are biased by his assumption that these

⁸ חבל, ציר, and חיל are considered under the heading “Birth-pangs and Fear” (Geburtsschmerz und Angst), כעס, יגה, and עצב under “Pain from Insult and Injury” (Schmerz durch Kränkung und Verletzung), דוה, חלה, and כאב under “Pain in Sickness and a Hopeless Situation” (Schmerz in Krankheit und hoffnungsloser Lage), אבל, קדר, עגם, and ספד under “Mourning” (Trauer), נחם under “Grief, Pain of Remorse, and Compassion” (Trost, Reueschmerz und Mitleid), and שיה under “Painful Worrying” (Schmerzliches Grübeln). Scharbert lastly includes a section on “Other Possibilities for the Description of Pain” (Andere Möglichkeiten für die Beschreibung von Schmerz), in which he considers, along with interjections such as אָהָה, אָלֵי, and others, descriptions of painful situations that do not explicitly use pain terminology.

⁹ In regard to his selection of Hebrew words, Scharbert notes that the terms that he studies are those rendered in dictionaries and translations with the German “‘Schmerz,’ ‘Trauer,’ ‘Weh,’ u.ä.,” as well as the corresponding verbs. However, it is not clear what other (u.ä.) German terms Scharbert used to select the Hebrew lexemes he studies. It is questionable whether terms such as חלה “to be sick,” דוה “to be ill,” or כעס “to be vexed, angry” in fact describe “pain” and belong in such a study. Additionally, his study omits certain Hebrew roots that could easily be included in one or more of the categories he treats such as אנה (“to sign, groan”), עטף (“to be feeble, faint”), עני (“affliction”), and צרה (“distress”), among others. Further, Scharbert's study also overlooks and omits many terms associated with other categories of pain, such as pain inflicted through violence, i.e., painful wounds.

¹⁰ Scharbert writes at the start that “the knowledge of etymological connections is crucial for the interpretation of many words” (Scharbert, *Schmerz*, 16; “die Kenntnis der etymologischen Zusammenhänge ist für die Deutung vieler Worte ausschlaggebend”). In his study, Scharbert seeks to discover the “concrete basic meaning” of various terms, but frequently does so by looking at etymological development, even if the actual linguistic context in the OT would yield a different sense of the word. This reliance on etymological connections appears to come into play especially in Scharbert's treatment of the Hebrew terms חיל, כאב, and אבל, among others.

words designate not the feeling of pain but the objective circumstances “from which the feeling can be inferred.”¹¹

Recent Contributions

A long period following Scharbert witnessed seemingly little research devoted to the topic of pain or the language of pain in the OT. Two works by Klaus Seybold published in the 1970s, *Das Gebet des Kranken im Alten Testament*¹² and *Krankheit und Heilung*,¹³ touch on the topic but ultimately focus primarily on sickness rather than pain. The publication of *Suffering and Sin* by Frederick Lindström in 1994¹⁴ represents the continued interest in the topic of suffering in the OT more broadly, and particularly its relation to sin, but the specific subject of pain and language for it in the OT remained relatively neglected until quite recently.

In the past few years, the topic of pain in the OT has begun to receive new attention in biblical scholarship. One clear evidence of this is the publication in 2021 of a volume of essays under the leadership of Saul Olyan and Michaela Bauks entitled *Pain in Biblical Texts and Other Materials of the Ancient Mediterranean*.¹⁵ This volume features

¹¹ Scharbert, *Schmerz*, 17; “Überhaupt werden zumeist nicht direkt die Empfindungen als solche, sondern vielmehr die objektiven Gegebenheiten bezeichnet, aus denen auf die Empfindung zurückgeschlossen werden kann.”

¹² Klaus Seybold, *Das Gebet des Kranken im Alten Testament: Untersuchungen zur Bestimmungen und Zuordnung der Krankheits- und Heilungspsalmen* (Stuttgart: Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 1973).

¹³ Klaus Seybold and Ulrich B. Mueller, *Krankheit und Heilung* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1978); English: *Sickness and Healing*, trans. Douglas W. Stott (Nashville: Abingdon, 1981).

¹⁴ Fredrik Lindström, *Suffering and Sin: Interpretations of Illness in the Individual Complaint Psalms*, trans. Michael McLamb (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1994).

¹⁵ Michaela Bauks and Saul M. Olyan, eds., *Pain in Biblical Texts and Other Materials of the Ancient Mediterranean* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2021).

a collection of essays studying “pain and its representation in the texts and non-literary remains of the ancient Eastern Mediterranean.”¹⁶ The editors note that “the representation of pain has received little or no attention from scholars who work in many areas of antiquity.”¹⁷ This volume is thus meant to “stimulate greater interest” in the “challenging and intriguing phenomenon” of pain.¹⁸ The essays cover a wide range of topics broadly focused on the literary and narrative representation of both physical and psychological pain in ancient texts, pain’s origins, and pain’s social and religious functions.¹⁹ Bauks and Olyan suggest that the “wide range of studies on pain and its representations” found

¹⁶ Michaela Bauks and Saul M. Olyan, “Introduction to the Volume,” in *Pain in Biblical Texts and Other Materials of the Ancient Mediterranean*, ed. Michaela Bauks and Saul M. Olyan, FAT 2 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2021), 8.

¹⁷ Bauks and Olyan, “Introduction,” 9.

¹⁸ Bauks and Olyan, “Introduction,” 9.

¹⁹ The book contains three primary sections, with essays representing a wide range of perspectives and approaches to the study of pain in these texts. The first section contains seven essays related to pain in the Hebrew Bible, Cuneiform texts, and material remains of the Iron age; the second has four essays on pain in the Greek Bible, Greek traditions, Apocryphal/ Deuterocanonical texts, and early Christian materials; the third contains two essays on pain in Rabbinic texts.

In the first section, one contributor surveys the phenomenon of pain in the whole Hebrew Bible, particularly focused on psychological pain (Andreas Wagner, “Schmerz im Alten Testament,” in *Pain in Biblical Texts*, 13–27), while other essays analyze aspects of pain in particular biblical texts: pain of childbirth in Genesis 3:16 (Michaela Bauks, “Pain in Childbirth: Gen 3:16 in Inner-Biblical Exegesis,” in *Pain in Biblical Texts*, 30–49), rhetoric of pain in Lamentations (Christian Frevel, “‘Seht meinen Schmerz!’: Rhetorik der Schmerzen in Klgl 1,” in *Pain in Biblical Texts*, 61–84), expressions of pain in Psalm 38 (Judith Gärtner, “‘Und mein Schmerz steht mir immer vor Augen’ (Ps 38,18): Schmerz als Ausdrucksform in den Psalmen am Beispiel von Ps 38,” in *Pain in Biblical Texts*, 84–101), and pain in ritualized torture in 2 Sam 8:2, 2 Kgs 25:7, and cuneiform texts (Saul M. Olyan, “Pain Imposed. The Psychological Torture of Enemies through Ritual Acts in Biblical and Cuneiform Sources,” in *Pain in Biblical Texts*, 51–60). One essay looks at the representation of pain in mourning and grief in Iron Age I coroplastic arts (Rüdiger Schmitt, “Mourning and Grief in Iron Age Coroplastic Arts from Palestine/Israel,” in *Pain in Biblical Texts*, 105–24), and the section closes with an essay citing a wide range of OT texts to consider the question of God’s pain within the biblical conception of God (Bernd Janowski, “Der Schmerz Gottes. Zu einem wichtigen Zug im biblischen Gottesbild,” in *Pain in Biblical Texts*, 125–42).

within the volume indicates “both the richness and complexity of the topic and the need for scholars to address it from a variety of perspectives.”²⁰

In 2022, a monograph on the topic of pain in the OT by scholar Dirk Sager was published entitled *Die Leidtragenden: Schmerz im Alten Testament*, the first major treatment dedicated to the subject since Josef Scharbert’s *Der Schmerz im Alten Testament* in 1955.²¹ Sager’s primary motivation appears to be to alert readers to the diversity of views of pain that he believes can be found in the OT. His research reviews and interacts with previous research on pain and attempts to update the work of Scharbert by incorporating insights that have arisen in cultural anthropology, pain medicine, and biblical exegesis since the publication of Scharbert’s work.²²

Sager’s section on the vocabulary for “Leid und Schmerz” in the OT is brief, though this is perhaps unsurprising given that Sager’s ultimate aim is to study not the language of pain but the phenomenon of pain, to discern what this vocabulary reveals

²⁰ Bauks and Olyan, “Introduction,” 8.

²¹ Dirk Sager, *Die Leidtragenden: Schmerz im Alten Testament* (Stuttgart: KBW Bibelwerk, 2022).

²² The book begins with a historical investigation: Chapter 1 outlines a concise history of research on pain from an interdisciplinary perspective, while Chapter 2 (Schmerz und Leid in der Welt des Alten Orients/Pain and Suffering in the World of the Ancient Orient) contains a brief comparative historical study of perspectives on pain found in writings of the ANE world. Sager then moves to an anthropological perspective. In Chapter 3 (Anthropologie des Schmerzes im Alten Testament/Anthropology of Pain in the Old Testament), Sager briefly examines vocabulary and forms of communication used to express pain in the OT and engages with topics such as the visibility of pain, the corporeality of pain, pain and communication, and pain as an anthropological constant. Chapter 4 (Lebenswelten des Schmerzes/Environments of Pain) examines specific life contexts in which pain is generally experienced, such as giving birth, sickness, chronic pain, violence, and death. This anthropological perspective is followed by a “conceptual-canonical” perspective in Chapter 5 (Konzeptionen von Schmerz ausgewählter Schriften des Alten Testaments/Conceptions of Pain in Selected Writings of the OT), where Sager examines individual OT books and argues that each of these books reveals different conceptions of pain. In Chapter 6 (Geschichte des Schmerzes im Alten Israel – Eine Skizze/History of Pain in Ancient Israel – A Sketch), Sager then attempts to outline a social and mental history of pain in ancient Israel. Sager concludes with a chapter containing a hermeneutical perspective on pain (Chapter 7: Hermeneutik des Schmerzes/Hermeneutic of Pain), in which he considers questions about the meaning of pain, the pain of God, and the ethics of pain in the OT.

about Israel's attitude toward and beliefs about pain. Although Sager sharply critiques Scharbert's process of selecting terms to study, his own discussion of Hebrew vocabulary for pain is itself selective and by no means comprehensive, and his choice of terms appears rather arbitrary.²³

The relatively limited scholarship on pain in the OT, as well as the challenges with the lexical analyses of both Scharbert and Sager, reveal that there are many potential avenues for research in this area. This thesis will enter into the study of pain in the OT by surveying some of the biblical Hebrew vocabulary for pain.

Goals of This Study

At a broad level, this thesis will seek to gain a better understanding of the semantic field of pain in biblical Hebrew and explore how a careful study of these terms and a greater awareness of the distinctions between them can inform biblical interpretation. Specifically, I will conduct a lexical semantic analysis of terms from the semantic field of "pain, pangs" found in *NIDOTTE* and seek to answer the questions: 1) How does an examination of this lexical field shape our understanding of the meanings of these terms? 2) How does this study help us to better understand and identify the boundaries of the semantic field? Does the semantic field in *NIDOTTE* need to be

²³ In his section on vocabulary for suffering and pain in the OT, which spans only about five pages of the book's total 237, Sager discusses only the following words: כאב, עצב, חיל, יגון, צר, רע, נגע, ידע, נכה, and הפך. According to Sager, this brief discussion of vocabulary is only a first step toward uncovering the language of pain in the OT and is not intended to be comprehensive. Thus, this section serves only as a rough initial orientation. But even as such, it still lacks mention of certain terms that one would expect to be included in even a brief discussion. Not only are obvious terms for physical suffering omitted (e.g., חִקְל), but the reader is also left with the question of why Sager chose to treat the verbs כאב and נכה but not the nouns derived from them (e.g., מְכָאֵב, מִכָּה) while including the nouns נָגַע and יָגוֹן but not their verbal roots נָגַע and יָגַע. Another perplexing issue is Sager's inclusion of certain terms that are used in contexts alongside pain terminology but do not directly signify pain (e.g., רָע, יָדַע).

broadened or narrowed? 3) What insight can this lexical study provide for interpreting Gen 3:16, where two terms from this semantic field are used? A comparison of these semantically related terms can bring the differences between them more clearly into view, which can then provide insight for interpreting passages where these terms are used.

In asking these questions, it becomes clear that the goals of my lexical analysis are somewhat different from those guiding the studies of pain discussed above. For Scharbert and others, the purpose of analyzing pain terminology was essentially only to access underlying conceptions about pain, or in order to build something like a theology of pain. My goal in studying these terms, by contrast, is not to discover how ancient Israelites conceptualized pain but to better understand what biblical authors are trying to convey with the use of these terms. In other words, the question is not “What do these words reveal about the concept of pain in the OT?” but “How does a deeper knowledge of what these words mean help us to understand biblical texts in which they are used?”

Methodology and Overview

Choice of Terminology

Because “pain” is a fairly broad term, which can encompass various forms of emotional or physical suffering, there are a number of Hebrew terms that could reasonably be included in a study of “language for pain” in the OT. In addition to the verb כאב, which has the broad sense “to be in pain,” and its related nouns, מְכָאֹב and כְּאֵב, “pain,” there are a number of terms that can be used to express various types of pain or painful experiences. On the more concrete side, there are words for wounds or injuries

because there is no entry for this term in *NIDOTTE*. Since צִיר is closely related semantically with these other terms, it has been included in the analysis below. Additionally, VanGemenen's list lacks עֶצֶב/עֶצָב, a hapax legomenon from the root עֶצַב, and תְּלַחְלָה, a noun from the root חִיל that occurs four times in the OT. Since all other verbal and nominal forms from these roots are considered in the analysis below, I have also added עֶצֶב/עֶצָב and תְּלַחְלָה to the list of terms under consideration in this thesis in order to cover all of the data related to these roots. Thus, the semantic domain of pain analyzed in this thesis includes a total of 18 Hebrew terms, which occur approximately 141 times total in the OT.

Method of Analysis

In this study, I will examine every occurrence of these words in their various contexts. Following in large part the methodology of C. John Collins,²⁵ my process for analyzing these terms will involve the following steps: (1) state morphological and etymological information, including occurrences in non-biblical Hebrew, data from cognate languages, and, for verbs, the stems used; (2) syntax (for verbs) or syntactic function (for nouns); (3) associative field, i.e., contexts of use, syntagmatic relations, and parallel words; and (4) use in extra-biblical and post-biblical Hebrew.

In addition to analyzing each of these terms individually, this study will also consider the relations between them, employing a field-oriented approach.²⁶ As J. C.

²⁵ C. John Collins, "Homonymous Verbs in Biblical Hebrew: An Investigation of the Role of Comparative Philology" (PhD diss., University of Liverpool, 1988), 24.

²⁶ John Sawyer introduces his lexical field study by noting that "one way to define a term is to distinguish it from terms semantically related to it, and this can best be done by reference to the semantic field to which the term belongs" (John F. Sawyer, *Semantics in Biblical Research: New Methods for Defining Hebrew*

Lübbe notes, the grouping of semantically related words “helps to clarify the specific meaning that a word has in contrast to the meanings of other words of related meaning.”²⁷ In other words, an examination of the lexical field²⁸ enables one to identify the particular semantic contribution that any one term makes: “by bringing together different words that belong to the same semantic domain...finer distinctions in meaning can be more easily seen and drawn.”²⁹ Thus, while each of the words in VanGemenen’s semantic domain will be examined individually below, it will also be necessary to compare these terms with one another to determine their shared and distinctive features. This comparison will allow us to sharpen our understanding of the meanings of these terms and to consider what implications might flow from the choice of one word from the semantic field instead of another.

Outline

Chapter 2 will consider the verbs כאב, עצב, and מרץ, along with the related nouns כאב, מקאוב, עץב, עץבת, עץבון, מעץבה, and עץב/עץב, as these terms, at least in certain contexts, seem to describe “pain” broadly. Chapter 3 will cover the remaining terms, חיל,

Words for Salvation [London: S.C.M. Press, 1972], 3). A field-oriented approach to meaning was first formulated by Jost Trier, who proposed that “the value of a word is first known when we mark it off against the value of neighboring and opposing words. Only as part of the whole does the word have sense; for only in the field is there meaning” (Jost Trier, *Der deutsche Wortschatz im Sinnbezirk des Verstandes. Die Geschichte eines sprachlichen Feldes* [Heidelberg: Carl Winters, 1931], 6, cited in Moisés Silva, *Biblical Words and Their Meaning: An Introduction to Lexical Semantics*, rev. ed. [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994], 161).

²⁷ J. C. Lübbe, “Semantic Domains, Associative Fields, and Hebrew Lexicography,” *Journal for Semitics* 12, no. 1 (2003): 138.

²⁸ In this paper, the terms “lexical field,” “semantic field,” and “semantic domain” are used interchangeably.

²⁹ Milton Eng, *The Days of Our Years: A Lexical Semantic Study of the Life Cycle in Biblical Israel* (New York: T&T Clark International, 2011), 14.

חֵיל, חֵילָה, חֵלְקָה, חֵבֵל, חֵבֵל, and צִיר, which can each have a narrower sense related to “pangs” or “labor pains.” In each of these chapters, I will not only discuss the semantics of these terms individually but also consider how they relate to and contrast with other words in the lexical domain of pain. The final section of Chapter 3 will also consider the question of whether the semantic field in *NIDOTTE* should be amended. Chapter 4 will apply the lexical work of these two chapters to a specific passage, Gen 3:16, which uses two of the terms from this semantic domain, עֶצְבוֹן and עֶצֶב. As will be discussed below, there has been much debate regarding the meaning of these terms in this passage. In this chapter, I will consider how a lexical study of the various terms in this semantic domain can resolve some of the perceived difficulties in this text and clarify the meaning of this passage.

This study of Hebrew pain terminology will not only lay important groundwork for the study of pain in the OT but will also illustrate how a semantic analysis and comparison of Hebrew words for pain can sharpen our understanding of their meanings and, in turn, inform our interpretation of texts that use these lexemes to speak about pain.

Chapter 2

Pain: כאב, עצב, מרץ

This chapter will begin to analyze the terms in the semantic domain of “pain, pangs,” beginning with verbs which can have the sense “pain” more generally:³⁰ כָּאַב, עָצַב, מָרַץ, and their related nouns. For each root, I will begin by examining the verbal occurrences of the root before considering its nominal forms.

כאב

The root כאב is found 30 times in the Old Testament, including eight occurrences of the verb כָּאַב, six occurrences of the noun כְּאַב, and 16 occurrences of the noun מְכָאוֹב.

כָּאַב

Morphology

Hebrew

The verb כָּאַב appears eight times in the OT, including four times in the qal (Gen 34:25; Job 14:22; Ps 69:30[29]; Prov 14:13) and four times in the hiphil (2 Kgs 3:19; Job 5:18; Ezek 13:22; 28:24). Two additional occurrences have been conjectured (Ezek 13:22a; Prov 3:12).³¹ The verb also occurs twice in Ben Sira, once in the qal and once in the hiphil.

³⁰ As will be discussed below, however, some of these terms do not only or always have the sense “pain.”

³¹ Ezek 13:22 reads: וְעַן הַקְּאוֹת לִב־צְדִיק לְשֹׁקֵר וְאֲנִי לֹא הַקְּאַבְתִּי וְלִסְנוֹן יְהִי רִשָׁע לְבַלְתִּי-שׁוּב מִדַּרְכּוֹ הִרְעָה לְהַחֲיוֹתוֹ. The BHS apparatus proposes reading the first verb, הַקְּאוֹת (a hiphil infinitive construct of כאה, “discourage”), as הַקְּאַיִב (a hiphil infinitive construct of כאב) because of the presence of הַקְּאַבְתִּי in the second part of the line (see

Other Semitic Languages

The root כאַב has cognates in Jewish Aramaic of the Babylonian and Targumic traditions.³² The Mandaean cognate *kib* has the senses “to pain, hurt, afflict, ache, be bent with pain.”³³ In Arabic, the cognate root *ka’iba* has the sense “to be sad,”³⁴ apparently designating aspects of mental suffering more than physical suffering.

Syntax

Qal

In all occurrences in the qal, the verb קאַב is intransitive, functioning essentially like a stative verb. In the qal, the syntax is:

קאַב <a> “a is in pain.”

also Walther Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel, Chapters 1–24*, trans. Ronald E. Clements [Augsburg: Fortress Publishers, 1979], 289). The verb כאַב is rare, occurring only twice in the niphil and once, here, in the hiphil; in one of its niphil occurrences, it is used with the noun לב “heart” (Ps 109:16), which also appears with the verb in Ezek 13:22. The LXX provides some support for the conjectural reading, as it translates both verbs (הַכְּאִיבִי and הַכְּאִיבִית) with the same Greek verb, διαστρέφω (ἀνθ’ ὧν διεστρέφετε καρδίαν δικαίου ἀδίκως και ἐγὼ οὐ διέστρεφον αὐτόν). However, as Block notes, “since the MT provides a reasonable sense, the lack of parallels is inadequate grounds for emendation” (Daniel I. Block, *Ezekiel 1–24*, NICOT [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997], 411; see also Horace D. Hummel, *Ezekiel 1–20* [Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2005], 363). In Prov 3:12 (כִּי אֶת אֲשֶׁר יֵאָהֵב לִי יִכְאֵב אֶת־בְּנִי וְרֵצָה לִּי יִהְיֶה יוֹקֵימ וְיִכְאֵב אֶת־בְּנוֹ יִרְצָה “for Yahweh reproves the one who he loves, and like a father the son with whom he is pleased”), the LXX reads μαστιγοῖ δέ for וְיִכְאֵב, suggesting an emendation to וְיִכְאֵב: μαστιγοῖ δὲ πάντα υἱὸν ὃν παραδέχεται “And he whips every son whom he accepts.” Murphy notes that “better parallelism is secured by reading יכאַב for יכאַב” (Roland E. Murphy, *Proverbs* [Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998], 20). But, as Fox points out, “in the emended text, the ‘son’ in the simile would be God’s instead of an indefinite father’s, and, as Ehrlich observes, individuals are not called ‘sons’ of God” (Michael V. Fox, *Proverbs 1–9: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Yale Bible [New York: Doubleday, 2000], 152). Likely, as Delitzsch proposes, “יִכְאֵב is to be carried forward in the mind from 12a” (Franz Delitzsch, *Proverbs of Solomon*, trans. M. G. Easton [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1884], 1:91): “as a father [reproves] the son with whom he is pleased.” The emendation thus seems to be unnecessary.

³² HALOT, s.v. “כאַב.” See Jastrow, s.v. “קאַב,” “קאַיב, קאַיב, קאַיב”; WTM, s.v. “קַיב, קַיב.”

³³ E. S. Drower and R. Machuch, *A Mandaic Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), 211.

³⁴ HALOT, s.v. “כאַב.”

This is seen, for example, in Prov 14:13: יִצְאֵב־לֵב “a heart is in pain.” Twice, the verb is modified by a prepositional phrase. In one instance, the preposition עַל modifies יִצְאֵב:

<d> יִצְאֵב עַל <a> “a is in pain upon/over d” (Job 14:22).

This syntax is unique, and it is unclear exactly what the function of the prepositional phrase is in the clause.³⁵ In another instance, a prepositional phrase with בְּ accompanies the verb, likely either indicating a “state or condition, whether material or mental, in which an action takes place”³⁶ or designating “concomitant (or surrounding) conditions.”³⁷ This construction is also found only once:

<d> בְּ יִצְאֵב <a> “a is in pain in [a state/condition of] d” (Prov 14:13).

The qal participle is used twice, both times as a predicate in a verbless clause.

Hiphil

In the hiphil, the verb יִצְאֵב is causative and can be formally transitive or intransitive. The transitive syntax occurs twice (2 Kgs 3:19; Ezek 13:22) and is:

<a> יִצְאֵב “b caused a to be in pain.”

In one instance, the hiphil verb is modified by an instrumental phrase with the preposition בְּ: “And they caused every good portion to be in pain *with/by means of* stones” (2 Kgs 3:19).

Twice, the hiphil is formally intransitive and does not have an explicit a-element.

One intransitive occurrence is found in Job 5:18, where the syntax is:

³⁵ See further discussion below.

³⁶ BDB, s.v. “בְּ.”

³⁷ BDB, s.v. “בְּ.”

הכאיב “b caused pain.”

Although the a-element is not specified, the verb still seems to have a causative sense, and the object is likely omitted for poetical reasons. The verb is again used intransitively in Ezek 28:24, where the hiphil participle מְכַאֵב appears as an attributive modifying the noun קוֹץ (“thorn”). Although the a-element is unspecified, the participle likely still has a causative force: קוֹץ מְכַאֵב “a thorn which causes pain” or “a thorn causing pain,” which perhaps could simply be rendered “a painful thorn.”

Associative Field

Contexts of Use

The verb כָּאֵב appears in wisdom literature (Job 5:18; 14:22; Prov 14:13), Psalms (Ps 69:30[29]), and prophecy (Ezek 13:22; 28:24), including in the prophetic speech of Elisha (2 Kgs 3:19). It appears only once in narrative (Gen 34:15). Half of the eight occurrences are in poetic literature (Ps 69:30[29]; Job 5:18; 14:22; Prov 14:13).

Syntagmatic Relations

The a-element in both the qal and hiphil designates the person or thing that is experiencing pain. The b-element, present only in the hiphil syntax, designates the person or thing inflicting or causing the pain. The a-element serves as the subject in most qal occurrences and as the object in the hiphil.

Twice, the a-element is explicitly a human being (Gen 34:25; Ps 69:30[29]), and elsewhere a human a-element is implied in the context (Job 5:18; Ezek 28:24).³⁸ Other a-elements include body parts, such as לב (Prov 14:13; see also Ezek 13:22³⁹) and בְּשָׁר (Job 14:22), though it is possible that these are metonymies for the person as a whole rather than references to specific organs of the body feeling pain. Thus, in most occurrences, the a-element experiencing pain, whether as a state of being or as something caused by an external actor, is a person. Only once is the a-element explicitly not a person (2 Kgs 3:19); here, the recipient of the action of the hiphil verb is a non-human object: פֶּלַח הַהֶסְלָקָה הַטּוֹבָה “Every good portion [of land].”

While the recipient of inflicted pain is usually a person, the agent causing the action (b-element) is usually a non-human actor. Twice, the actor is God (Job 5:18; Ezek 13:22); elsewhere, it is a thorn (קוֹץ), though the “thorn causing pain” (קוֹץ מְכַאֵב) is probably a metaphor referring to Israel’s enemies.⁴⁰ In one occurrence, the agents are human beings (2 Kgs 3:19),⁴¹ but in this passage the a-element is non-human: portions of

³⁸ In these two hiphil occurrences, the a-element is not explicitly stated, but the context suggests that the implied object of the verbal action is again a person or people. In Ezek 28:24, most likely בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל (“the house of Israel”), which is the object of the preposition לְ, would be the implied recipient of the pain caused by the thorn. The בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל likely refers to the people of Israel.

³⁹ The Hebrew of Ezek 13:22 reads יַעַן הִקְאוֹת לִב־צַדִּיק שֶׁקֶר וְאָנִי לֹא הִקְאֲבֹתִי כִּי אֲבִי לִב־צַדִּיק “because you disheartened the heart of the righteous falsely, and I myself did not dishearten the righteous.” The 3ms suffix on the hiphil perfect 1cs form of אֲבִי (הִקְאֲבֹתִי) serves as the object and a-element of the verb; the suffix could refer to either the construct phrase לִב־צַדִּיק “the heart of the righteous” or simply to צַדִּיק “the righteous [person].” In either case, the meaning remains essentially the same, since “the heart of the righteous” is probably a metonymy for the righteous person himself.

⁴⁰ קוֹץ מְכַאֵב and סִלּוֹן מְקַאֵר are both likely metaphorical within the verse, referring not to the absence of literal briars and thorns but to the absence of Israel’s enemies around them to cause them harm.

⁴¹ The 2mp subject of the verb תִּקְאֲבוּ refers to the kings of Judah, Israel, and Edom.

land in Moab (תִּלְקָה). The verb is thus never used in biblical texts of one human inflicting pain on another human.

As noted above, the verb כָּאַב is modified by the preposition בְּ once in the hiphil and once in the qal. In the hiphil, the בְּ is instrumental, designating the means by which the actor will cause or inflict pain upon the recipient: וְכָל הַתִּלְקָה הַטּוֹבָה תִּכְאָבוּ בְּאֲבָנִים “You shall every good piece of land *with stones*” (2 Kgs 3:19). In the qal, the modifying prepositional phrase with בְּ indicates a surrounding condition in which the a-element may experience pain: וְגַם־בְּשִׂחוֹק יִכְאֵב־לֵב “Even *in laughter* a heart will be in pain” (Prov 14:13).

The preposition עַל modifies the verb כָּאַב in the qal once, in the phrase אֲדִי־בָשָׂרוֹ יִכְאֵב (Job 14:22). There are multiple questions that arise in the interpretation of this verse, both linguistically and theologically.⁴² Here, it is sufficient to note that the 3ms

⁴² First, what is the subject (a-element) of the 3ms verb יִכְאֵב? The subject could be בָּשָׂרוֹ (“his flesh”) (NASB, NKJV, KJV, NET) or simply “he,” the referent of the 3ms pronoun attached to בָּשָׂרוֹ (ESV, NIV, NRSV). If the parallelism between the first and second lines of the verse is taken into account, the subject of the first line should likely be understood as בָּשָׂרוֹ. In the parallel clause (וְנִפְשׁוֹ עָלְיוֹ תִאָּבֵל), נִפְשׁוֹ is unambiguously the subject of the 3fs verb תִּאָּבֵל (“his soul mourns”).

אֲדִי־בָשָׂרוֹ עָלְיוֹ יִכְאֵב noun with suffix + על with suffix + verb
 וְנִפְשׁוֹ עָלְיוֹ תִאָּבֵל noun with suffix + על with suffix + verb

It is also possible that both בָּשָׂרוֹ and נִפְשׁוֹ here stand for the person as a whole, so that ultimately there may be little difference in meaning if “his flesh” is taken as the subject of the verb יִכְאֵב rather than “he” (see David J. A. Clines, *Job 1–20*, Word Biblical Commentary [Dallas: Word Books, 1989], 336; Robert Gordis, *The Book of Job: Commentary, New Translation, and Special Studies* [New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1978], 153).

Second, who or what is the antecedent of the 3ms pronoun suffixed to the preposition עַל? The options include the masculine singular noun בָּשָׂר (“flesh”) or the 3ms pronoun suffixed to בָּשָׂר, the antecedent of which is likely אָדָם “man” (14:10); a third (perhaps less plausible) possibility is that the antecedent is the 3ms pronominal suffix (לָמוֹ) at the end of 14:21, which refers to a situation in which a person’s sons “come to honor, and he does not know [it]; they are brought low, and he does not perceive it [לָמוֹ].” Again, taking the parallelism into account, the 3ms suffix on the preposition in the second line, וְנִפְשׁוֹ עָלְיוֹ תִאָּבֵל, likely does not refer to נִפְשׁוֹ, since one would expect a feminine suffix in a reference to the feminine noun נִפְשׁוֹ. Thus, most likely, the 3ms pronoun suffixed to עַל in both lines simply refers to the “he” being discussed in this passage, representing man or mankind generally (אָדָם, 14:1; אָדָם, 14:10, 14; אִישׁ, 14:12; אָנוּשׁ, 14:19); this representative person is likely the referent of all four object suffixes in this verse.

Third, what is the function of the preposition על? BDB suggests that the preposition על may be used here idiomatically “to give pathos to the expression of an emotion, by emphasizing the person who is its subject, and who, as it were, feels it acting upon him” (BDB, s.v. “על”); this usage is sometimes called a “pathetic” על; see also Clines, *Job 1–20*, 336; Gordis, 153; S. R. Driver and George Buchanan Gray, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Job* [New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1921], 1:131). If this suggestion is correct, the prepositional phrase could be seen as an intensifying phrase and the 3ms object would essentially be another expression of the a-element, the one experiencing pain (בְּשָׂרוֹ). Alternatively, Delitzsch suggests that עליו “signifies...*propter eum* [because of him]” (Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Book of Job*, trans. Francis Bolton [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1881], 1:238). This option, in which על designates cause or the “object upon which an action or emotion...is conceived as being directed” (BDB, s.v. “על”), may be preferable in light of the parallel in line b, where עליו occurs with the verb אבל. Elsewhere, the preposition על is used with אבל to give the object or cause of mourning, as, for example, in Hos 10:5: עָלְיוּ עִמּוֹ אֲבָל “Its people mourn for/over it” (see also Jer 4:28). This could be the sense of על + אבל in Job 14:22b (“his soul mourns for/over himself”), in which case perhaps the same sense for על should be understood in 14:22a (“his flesh feels pain for/on account of himself”). It is difficult to be certain, however, whether על is being used in a pathetic or causal sense here.

Fourth, and related to how one takes the preposition על, what is the function of the particle אֲשֶׁר? The particle could be emphatic (“surely,” “indeed”); so Gordis, 153) or restrictive (“only”). If restrictive, the particle could, but does not necessarily have to (see GKC §153), modify the noun that immediately follows (רִשְׁוֹ): “only his flesh feels pain,” that is, only his flesh and nothing or no one else, such as his children mentioned in the previous verse, feels pain for him and grieves for him (for this interpretation, see Amos Ḥakham, *The Bible: Job with the Jerusalem Commentary* [Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 2009], 142). אֲשֶׁר, if restrictive, could alternatively modify the prepositional phrase עליו, taken in a pathetic sense (see Clines, *Job 1–20*, 278, “he feels only his own pain”; ESV “he feels only the pain of his own body”) or a causal sense (“his flesh is in pain only עליו,” that is, only on account of himself and not on account of anything or anyone else; see Delitzsch, *Job*, 1:236: “only on his own account his flesh suffereth pain”; William David Reyburn, *A Handbook on the Book of Job* [New York: United Bible Societies, 1992], 281: “he knows nothing but his own pain”; John Gray, *The Book of Job* [Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2010], 234).

Ḥakham notes that many commentators take this line as meaning “only while is flesh is upon him (that is, while he is alive), will he be in pain, but not after his death” (Ḥakham, *Job*, 142; see Naphtali H. Tur-Sinai, *The Book of Job: A New Commentary* [Jerusalem: Kiryath Sepher, 1957], 244; see also John E. Hartley, *The Book of Job*, NICOT [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988], 240). However, as Ḥakham notes, “this interpretation does not suit the context of the verse, which is discussing what happens to people after death and not what happens to them while they are alive” (Ḥakham, *Job*, 142–43).

While other explanations are certainly possible, the context perhaps lends support to taking the prepositional phrase עליו as having an objective/causal sense (“only upon him/on account of himself”), and אֲשֶׁר as restrictive, modifying the prepositional phrase. The previous verse states that the dead person is unaware of the state of his sons who are still living: “his sons are honored, and he does not know [it]; they are humbled, and he does not perceive it” (Job 14:21). This idea likely extends into Job 14:22, and אֲשֶׁר-רִשְׁוֹ אֲבָל probably then means that the deceased person feels only his own pain, not the pain of others, such as his children: “his flesh feels pain only upon/on account of himself; his soul mourns for himself.” As Reyburn writes, the “dead man is unaware of the important things taking place around him, such as the honor or disgrace of his sons. His only awareness is confined to his own death pains” (Reyburn, 281). Delitzsch similarly explains, “he has no knowledge and interest that extends beyond himself; only he himself is the object of that which takes place with his flesh in the grave, and of that on which his soul reflects below in the depths of Hades” (Delitzsch, *Job*, 238). For further discussion of this difficult passage and the various interpretive options, see Delitzsch, *Job*, 1:237–38; Gordis, 134; Ḥakham, *Job*, 142–43. Since the verse appears to be describing what happens to a person after his death, this verse also raises numerous questions regarding views about the afterlife in the OT. Such questions, while important, are ultimately outside of the scope of this study.

object suffixed to על likely refers to the person being described in this chapter, who is in a post-death state.

Parallel Words

In 2 Kgs 3:19, the verb פָּאַב in the hiphil appears alongside three phrases describing the destruction of the land of Moab:

וְהִפִּיתֶם כָּל-עִיר מְבֻצָּר וְכָל-עִיר מְבַחֵר	“And you shall strike [נכה] every fortified city and every choice city,
וְכָל-עֵץ טוֹב תִּפְּלוּ	and every good tree you shall fell [נפל],
וְכָל-מַעְיָנַיִם מֵיִם תִּסְתָּמוּ	and all the springs of water you shall stop up [סתם],
וְכָל חֵלֶקֶת הַטֹּבָה תִּכְאַבוּ בְּאֲבָנִים	and every good portion you shall cause pain to/mar [כאַב] with stones.”

The action of תִּכְאַבוּ in this context thus adds another element of physical devastation to be inflicted on the land. The verb פָּאַב also occurs with the following parallel words:

מָחַץ “to shatter” (Job 5:18)
אָבַל “to mourn” (Job 14:22)
עָנִי “afflicted” (Ps 69:30)
תּוֹגָה “grief” (Prov 14:13)
פָּאַה “to dishearten” (Ezek 13:22)
מָאַר “to pain, prick” (Ezek 28:24)

The verb פָּאַב can thus be found with a variety of parallels, including terms that convey a sense of grief or mourning (e.g., תּוֹגָה, אָבַל) and those more closely related to physical pain (e.g., מָאַר, מָחַץ). It is not necessarily the case that פָּאַב is synonymous with these parallel terms, since Hebrew parallelism does not necessarily imply a synonymy of sense between the two lines or between individual terms within the lines. It would be more appropriate to say that פָּאַב is co-referential with these various terms in these contexts. פָּאַב is not properly “synonymous,” for example, with אָבַל but can be used to describe a referent that

also can be described with אָבַל, perhaps approaching it from a slightly different angle. There is overlap not in the senses of the two terms but in their referent.

In Job 5:18, the hiphil of כאב is set in opposition to the verb חָבַשׁ: Yahweh causes pain (יִכְאֵיב) but also “binds up” (יִחַבֵּשׁ). The word מָחַץ “smite through, shatter,” a more concrete term than כאב, appears in the parallel line, set in opposition to רָפָא “to heal”:

כִּי הוּא יִכְאֵיב וְיִחַבֵּשׁ “For he causes pain, but he binds up;
אֲמָחַץ וְיָדוֹ תִרְפֶּינָה he shatters, but his hand heals.”

Here, the second line likely sharpens the image of the first. The use of כאב alongside חָבַשׁ would seem to generate an image of a painful wound or injury that must be bound up to heal; the image of binding up here is possibly figurative for comforting one in emotional distress.

Post-Biblical Hebrew

The verb כָּאַב occurs twice in Ben Sira, once in the qal (13:5) and once in the hiphil (4:3). In the qal usage, the verb is intransitive and has the syntax <a> “a was in pain.” This construction appears in Ben Sira 13:5, אִם שְׁלָהּ יִיטִיב דְּבָרָיו עִמָּךְ וִירְשִׁשְׁךָ וְלֹא יִכְאֵב לּוֹ, which Schechter and Taylor translate, “If thou have substance (?), he will speak thee fair; and he will impoverish thee, and will not be sorry.”⁴³ Here, the a-element (3ms subject “he”) is a person, most likely עָשִׁיר “the rich” (13:3). In the hiphil, the verb is causative and transitive, with the syntax <a> הכאיב “b caused a to be in pain,” where

⁴³ Solomon Schechter and Charles Taylor, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira: Portions of the Book of Ecclesiasticus from Hebrew Manuscripts in the Cairo Genizah Collection Presented to the University of Cambridge by the Editors* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1899), xxvii. See also Ges¹⁸, “und es tut ihm nicht leid” (Wilhelm Gesenius, *Hebräisches und Aramäisches Handwörterbuch über das Alte Testament*, ed. Rudolf Meyer et al., 18th ed. [Berlin: Springer Verlag, 2013], s.v. “כאב”).

b is a person (2ms) and a is קָרַב עֲנִי “the inward parts of the poor/afflicted” (Sir 4:3).⁴⁴ In both usages in Ben Sira, the verb seems to refer to emotional pain.

Semantic Conclusions

In light of the analysis above, a few brief comments may be made on the semantics of the verb כָּאֵב. The verb seems to have a broad sense, “to be in pain,” that can encompass both physical and psychological suffering. While כָּאֵב most often describes the pain of a person, it can also be used figuratively to describe physical damage inflicted on a portion of land, an inanimate object that would generally not be recognized as capable of feeling pain (2 Kgs 3:19). The term’s one narrative occurrence clearly refers to physical pain, as it is used to describe the experience of a group of men a few days after their circumcision (Gen 34:25). The verb also seems to be used to describe physical pain elsewhere in expressions that function metaphorically. For example, on the surface, the phrase סֵלֶזֶן מִמְּאִיר וְקוֹץ מִכְּאֵב “a pricking brier and a thorn causing pain” in Ezek 28:24 clearly portrays an image of physically painful objects. However, as noted above, the image as a whole is a metaphor for Israel’s enemies.⁴⁵ Elsewhere, it is less clear what type of pain is in view (Ps 69:30[29]; Job 14:22), and in some contexts, the verb seems to describe not primarily physical pain but emotional or psychological pain (Prov 14:13).

⁴⁴ According to Schechter and Taylor, Ben Sira 4:3 reads אֵל [תְּהַמִּיר] מְעִי דָךְ וְקָרַב עֲנִי אֵל תְּכָאִיב “Trouble not the bowels of him that is humbled; And pain not the inward part of the poor” (xvii). However, this second clause, וְקָרַב עֲנִי אֵל תְּכָאִיב, is omitted in the Greek, and only a trace of it is found in the Syriac (לֹא תִכְאֵב) (Schechter and Taylor, 40).

⁴⁵ See also Job 5:18, where the image is of physical pain or a wound that can be “bound up,” but the referent may be psychological pain.

Thus, while כָּאַב has the sense “to feel pain” (qal) or “to cause/infllict pain” (hiphil), this sense is broad enough that it can be used to refer to many different types of pain.

כָּאַב

Morphology

Hebrew

The noun כָּאַב is used six times in the OT, always as a singular noun. In post-biblical Hebrew, כָּאַב occurs six times, including twice in DSS and four times in Ben Sira.

Other Semitic Languages

The word כָּאַב has cognates in a few Semitic languages. The word כָּאַבָּא appears in Jewish Aramaic of the Babylonian and Targumic traditions and in Syriac.⁴⁶ The Mandaean word *kiba* has the sense “pain, affliction, suffering, sickness, disease, sore.”⁴⁷ Another Mandaean derivative from the root *kēb* is the term *kaiub*, which has the sense “aching, paining, suffering, painful” and can be used in phrases such as “my aching heart.”⁴⁸ The related Egyptian Aramaic root כִּיב meaning “pain”⁴⁹ appears in a fifth-

⁴⁶ HALOT, s.v. “כָּאַב.”

⁴⁷ Drower and Machuch, 211. The term is often used in the phrase *kib riša* (headache).

⁴⁸ Drower and Machuch, 211.

⁴⁹ Charles F. Jean, *Dictionnaire des Inscriptions Sémitiques de l'Ouest* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1965), 118.

century Aramaic papyrus in the phrase **איש כיבי אבהיהם** “...every man the pains of their fathers.”⁵⁰

Syntactic Function

כְּאַב occurs four times as the subject of a verb (Job 2:13; 16:6; Ps 39:3[2]; Jer 15:18), once as the object of a preposition (Isa 65:14), and once as a genitive in a construct phrase (Isa 17:11). The noun can be definite or indefinite, occurring three times with the suffixed 1cs pronoun and once with the definite article **ה**.

Associative Field

Contexts of Use

With the exception of Job 2:13, which is a narrative text, all occurrences of **כְּאַב** are in poetic contexts. The noun **כְּאַב** appears in prophecy (Isa 17:11; 65:14; Jer 15:18), wisdom literature (Job 2:13; 16:6), and Psalms (Ps 39:3[2]).

Syntagmatic Relations

כְּאַב occurs in construct with the genitive **לֵב** (**כְּאַב לֵב**, “pain of heart,” Isa 65:14) and as one of two genitive nouns with the construct **יּוֹם** (**יּוֹם נִחְלָה וּכְאַב אָנִישׁ**, “day of sickness and incurable pain,” Isa 17:11). In Isa 65:14, the construct **כְּאַב לֵב** is the object of the preposition **מִן**. In Isa 17:11, the construct phrase is the object of the preposition **בְּ**, which here has a temporal sense.

⁵⁰ Papyrus 71 in A. Cowley, *Aramaic Papyri of the Fifth Century B.C.* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923), 179–80.

The noun **כָּאֵב** typically describes the experience of a person. Three times, the noun **כָּאֵב** takes a 1cs pronoun suffix to indicate the person experiencing **כָּאֵב** (Job 16:6; Ps 39:3[2]; Jer 15:18). In Job 2:13, the context indicates that **הַכָּאֵב** refers to the pain experienced by Job. In Isa 65:14, **כָּאֵב** is in construct with **לֵב**, designating a person's "heart" as the thing experiencing pain. Here, **לֵב** may simply be a metonymy for the person as a whole, or the construct with **לֵב** could indicate that the referent here is mental or emotional suffering. Only once is the referent of **כָּאֵב** possibly non-human (Isa 17:11); in the phrase **בְּיּוֹם נִחְלָה וּכְאֵב אֲנוּשׁ**, it is somewhat unclear precisely who or what will experience **כָּאֵב**. Here, **כָּאֵב אֲנוּשׁ** may refer figuratively to some sort of pain experienced by the land itself, which is spoken of in the immediate context.⁵¹ Alternatively, it may refer more generally to a coming day of judgment that will entail **נִחְלָה** and **כָּאֵב אֲנוּשׁ** for the inhabitants of the land. Thus, with possibly the one exception of Isa 17:11, the noun **כָּאֵב** generally refers to pain experienced by a person or people.

When it functions as the subject of a verb, **כָּאֵב** occurs primarily with verbs that are passive or stative. **כָּאֵב** is the subject of the verb **עָכַר** (niph'al) in Ps 39:3[2], where the psalmist describes his **כָּאֵב** as being "stirred up" (**כְּאֵבִי נִעְכָּר**). In Job 2:13, **כָּאֵב** is the subject of **גָּדַל** and accompanied by the intensifying adverb **מְאֹד** (**מְאֹד גָּדַל הַכָּאֵב**, "the pain was exceedingly great"). The expression is part of an object clause, introduced by **כִּי** with the verb **רָאָה**. The fact that Job's friends can "see" (**רָאָה**) that his **כָּאֵב** was very great (Job 2:13) suggests that **כָּאֵב** refers here to something that has visible effects

⁵¹ The phrase comes in the context of Isaiah's prophecy about God's judgment on Damascus. Specifically, Isaiah is here speaking about how this judgment will affect their land and its produce: "you will plant pleasant plants and sow the vine-branch of a stranger, you will make them grow on the day that you plant them and make them blossom in the morning that you sow, yet the harvest will flee away in a day of **נִחְלָה** and **כָּאֵב אֲנוּשׁ**" (Isa 17:10–11).

that can be observed by outsiders.⁵² In Job 16:6, כָּאֵב is the subject of the verb חָשַׁךְ in the niph'al (לֹא־יִחַשְׁךָ כָּאֵבִי “my pain is not assuaged”). כָּאֵב also appears as the subject of הָיָה, a copula joining the subject (כָּאֵב) with the predicate noun נֶצַח “duration”: הָיָה כָּאֵבִי נֶצַח “My pain was/has become endless” (Jer 15:18).⁵³ This phrase, along with the usage of כָּאֵב in Isa 17:11 modified by the adjective אָנוּשׁ (“incurable”), suggests that כָּאֵב can refer to pain that is ongoing or chronic. In Isa 65:14, כָּאֵב occurs as the object of מִן. The prepositional phrase מִכָּאֵב לֵב “from pain of heart” modifies the verb תִּצְעַקוּ “you will cry out” and likely has a causal force, giving the reason for the action of the verb.

Parallel Words

The noun כָּאֵב appears once in combination with the noun נִחְלָה, “sickness” (Isa 17:11), as well as once with the noun מַכָּה, “wound, blow” (Jer 15:18). In Jer 15:18, the phrase כָּאֵבִי נֶצַח (“my pain is endless”) is parallel to מַכְתִּי אָנוּשָׁה (“my wound is incurable”). These phrases are likely co-referential, but it is possible that the phrase מַכְתִּי אָנוּשָׁה heightens or intensifies כָּאֵבִי נֶצַח, with the more concrete noun מַכָּה perhaps denoting a specific type of כָּאֵב, functioning as a hyponym of כָּאֵב.

In Isa 65:14, two phrases are syntactically parallel to מִכָּאֵב לֵב (“from pain of heart”):

<p>הִנֵּה עֲבָדַי יִרְנּוּ מִטּוֹב לֵב וְאַתֶּם תִּצְעַקוּ מִכָּאֵב לֵב וּמִשִּׁבְרַת רִיחַ תִּגְלִילוֹ</p>	<p>“Behold, my servants shall rejoice from goodness of heart, but you shall cry out from pain of heart, and from breaking of spirit, you shall howl.”</p>
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⁵² Whether this implies that Job’s friends could see his physical pain, or simply that they could infer he was in significant pain from seeing his response to it, is unclear.

⁵³ HALOT, s.v. “נֶצַח.”

The parallelism between the first clause (65:14a) and the second (65:14b) is semantically antithetical, as the two lines set up a contrast of the verbal actions (“rejoice” [רָגַן] // “cry out” [צָעַק]) and of the sources/causes of these actions, indicated by the preposition מִן (“goodness/joy [טוֹב] of heart” // “pain [כָּאֵב] of heart”). While the first two lines create a contrast between the actions of the faithful and the unfaithful,⁵⁴ the relation between the second and third lines is one of similarity. In lines 2 and 3, there is parallelism again of the verbs (“cry out” [צָעַק] // “howl” [לָלַל]) and the phrases indicating source/cause (“pain [כָּאֵב] of heart” // “breaking [שָׁבַר] of spirit”). While שָׁבַר is not properly a synonym of כָּאֵב, these terms are co-referential and mutually amplifying; שָׁבַר may be a hyponym of כָּאֵב, designating a more narrow or specific type of pain. The parallelism of the two lines is likely dynamic, with “wail from breaking of spirit” intensifying or sharpening the image in the phrase “cry out from pain of heart.”

Post-Biblical Hebrew

The noun כָּאֵב is used twice in the DSS in prayers of lament, both times modified by the adjective אֲנוּשׁ: “an incurable pain.”⁵⁵ In both occurrences, the noun כָּאֵב occurs in close proximity with נִגַּע. In 1QH^a 13:28, it is parallel with the phrase וְנִגַּע וְנִמְאָר (“a wasting disease”). In the context, the speaker laments that not only do his rivals slander him but now also his companions have turned against him and mock him. Their “lying tongue” is pictured metaphorically as poisonous venom, which has become “an incurable pain

⁵⁴ The referent of the “you” (2mp) is those who forsake Yahweh (65:11), while עֲבָדַי “my servants” clearly refers to the faithful who follow Yahweh.

⁵⁵ The phrase is reminiscent of Isa 17:11, where the noun is also modified by אֲנוּשׁ.

[לכאיב אנוש] and wasting disease [ונגע נמאר]” within the speaker.⁵⁶ In 1QH^a 16:28, the prayer describes his diseased condition: “26...my heart kn[ow]s 27 diseases, and I am like a forsaken man in pai[ns ...], there is no refuge for me. For my disease has increased 28 to bitterness and an incurable pain [וכאיב אנוש] which does not stop.”⁵⁷ In both contexts, the term is found in an extensive, vivid description of the speaker’s emotional and physical anguish.

The noun כָּאֵב also occurs four times in Ben Sira (4:6; 30:17 [2x]; 34:29). Once, it appears in construct with נִפְשׁוֹ as the object of the preposition ׀ modifying the verb צועק: “He that is bitter of spirit crieth in the anguish [כאב] of his soul” (4:6).⁵⁸ In 30:17, כָּאֵב occurs twice, once modified by the attributive participle נֶאֱמָן (“made firm, sure, lasting”) and once modified by the attributive participle עומד; in both lines, the noun כָּאֵב functions as the object of the preposition מן in a comparative clause: “Better is to die than a life of vanity; and eternal rest than continual pain [מכאב נאמן]. Better is to die than life that is evil; And to go down to Sheol than lasting pain [מכאב עומד].”⁵⁹ While it is somewhat ambiguous in 30:17 whether the pain is physical or psychological, the כָּאֵב in 4:6 is perhaps to be understood as internal or psychological, given the construct with

⁵⁶ Florentino García Martínez and Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar, eds., *The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 173.

⁵⁷ Martínez and Tigchelaar, 183. Hebrew (182): אין ...[...ים]...26 ומ[וד]ע לב 27 בנגיעים ואהיה כאיש נעזב ביגונ[ים]... אין (182): מעוז לי כי פרה נגעי 28 למרורים וכאיב אנוש לאין עצור

⁵⁸ Translation from Schechter and Taylor, xvii. Hebrew from Pancratius C. Beentjes, *The Book of Ben Sira in Hebrew: A Text Edition of All Extant Hebrew Manuscripts and a Synopsis of All Parallel Hebrew Ben Sira Texts* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 24.

⁵⁹ Translation from Schechter and Taylor, xxxv. Hebrew (Beentjes, 54): טוב למות מחיי שוא ונוחת עולם מכאב נאמן טוב למות מחיים רעים ולירד שאול מכאב עומד

נִפְשׁוּ. In Sir 34:29, קָאָב occurs in construct with ראש, “*pain of the head, i.e. headache, is...as wine that is drunk in strife and vexation*” (כאב ראש לענה וקלון יין נשתה בתחרה וכעס).⁶⁰

Semantic Conclusions

Based on the observations above, קָאָב appears to be a general term for pain that can designate varied forms of suffering or discomfort that elicit diverse responses.⁶¹ In Isa 65:14, the combination of קָאָב in the construct phrase with לָב probably indicates that קָאָב here describes mental or emotional pain. In Jer 15:18, on the other hand, where קָאָב is parallel with מִכָּה, קָאָב would seem to describe physical pain, though the referent is likely not an actual physical injury but Jeremiah’s psychological suffering associated with his prophetic vocation. In other contexts, it is unclear whether the referent is physical or emotional pain, and it is possible that both are in view (Ps 39:3[2]; Job 2:13; 16:6). The noun קָאָב thus seems to have a broad sense, “pain,” that can be used to refer to emotional and physical pain. The occurrence of מִכָּה and נִעְבָּר alongside קָאָב suggests that perhaps these more concrete terms are hyponyms of the more abstract term קָאָב.

⁶⁰ DCH, s.v. “קָאָב.”

⁶¹ In some instances, the response to קָאָב is to “cry out” (Isa 65:14) or to speak (Job 16:6), while in others the response is silence (Job 2:13; Ps 39:3[2]). However, for those experiencing it, קָאָב is apparently assuaged neither by speaking (Job 16:6) nor by silence (Ps 39:3[2]; despite the psalmist’s attempts to be silent [presumably expecting his silence to somehow alleviate his pain], his pain is only stirred up: נִאֲלַמְתִּי: “I was mute, silent, I was silent without good, and my קָאָב was stirred up”).

מְאֵיב

Morphology

The noun מְאֵיב occurs 16 times in the OT and has the broad sense “pain.” It occurs in both the singular (11x) and plural (5x). Most of the plural forms are masculine (מְאֵיבִים) but in one occurrence the plural has a feminine form (מְאֵיבוֹת) with no apparent difference in meaning (Isa 53:3). מְאֵיב also occurs eight times in post-biblical Hebrew.

Syntactic Function

While it never appears explicitly as the subject of a verb, מְאֵיב functions as the subject in verbless clauses three times and once as the implied subject of a passive verb (Lam 1:12). It also occurs eight times as the direct object of a verb, four times as the object of a preposition, and once as the genitive in a construct phrase. מְאֵיב can be definite or indefinite, with definiteness indicated by a pronominal suffix or by the definiteness of a noun with which מְאֵיב is in construct (Ps 69:27[26]).

Associative Field

Contexts of Use

מְאֵיב occurs frequently in poetry, with 12 of its 16 uses coming in poetic texts. The noun מְאֵיב is used in prophetic literature (Isa 53:3, 4; Jer 30:15; 45:3; 51:8), wisdom literature (Job 33:19; Eccl 1:18; 2:23), Psalms (Ps 32:10; 38:18[17]; 69:27[26]), and Lamentations (1:12[2x], 18). It also occurs twice in narrative speeches (Exod 3:7; 2 Chron 6:29).

Syntagmatic Relations

The noun מְכָאוֹב occurs nine times with a pronominal suffix indicating the one(s) experiencing מְכָאוֹב.⁶² מְכָאוֹב may be felt by a specific individual, such as Baruch (Jer 45:3) or the psalmist (Ps 38:18[17]), who each describe their own experience as מְכָאֲבִי “my pain.” Elsewhere, the one experiencing מְכָאוֹב is not a specific individual but a person in general (אָדָם “a man” who toils, Eccl 2:23; אִישׁ, 2 Chron 6:29; גִּבּוֹר, Job 33:19; see also Eccl 1:18; Ps 69:27[26]) or one who represents a category of people (רִשָּׁע, “the wicked one,” Ps 32:10). This suggests מְכָאוֹב can be used to refer not only to a specific person’s concrete, personal experience but also to a general phenomenon. Twice, the one experiencing מְכָאוֹב is not explicitly a person (Jer 51:8; Eccl 1:18), but in both cases, the implied referent is probably a person or people.⁶³ Thus, מְכָאוֹב generally refers to pain experienced by a person.

The noun מְכָאוֹב frequently occurs as the direct object of a verb. A person’s מְכָאוֹב can be seen (רָאָה, Lam 1:18),⁶⁴ recounted (סָפַר piel, Ps 69:27[26]),⁶⁵ or carried (סָבַל, Isa

⁶² The suffixed pronoun can be first (Ps 38:18[17]), second (Jer 30:15), or third person (Exod 3:7) and can refer to an individual (2 Chron 6:29; Lam 1:12, 18), a group of people (Exod 3:7; Isa 53:4; Jer 30:15), or a nation (Jer 51:8).

⁶³ In Jer 51:8 (מְכָאוֹבָהּ), the antecedent of the 3fs suffix is the nation of Babylon (בָּבֶל); however, בָּבֶל here may refer to the inhabitants of Babylon specifically. In Eccl 1:18, מְכָאֲבִים is syntactically predicated of the noun יָמִים (“days”) but, in the phrase כָּל-יְמֵי מְכָאֲבִים “all his days are מְכָאֲבִים,” מְכָאֲבִים probably refers to pains experienced by the representative person himself.

⁶⁴ מְכָאוֹב is also found with the verb רָאָה in Lam 1:12, where it is not syntactically the direct object of the verb but is still the object that is “seen” (וּרְאִי אִם-יֵשׁ מְכָאוֹב כְּמְכָאוֹבִי “see if there is pain like my pain”).

⁶⁵ With סָפַר מְכָאוֹב is preceded by the preposition אֶל marking the direct object of the verb. The MT has יִסְפְּרוּ (piel impf 3mp from סָפַר), but a note in the BHS apparatus proposes this should be read instead as יִסְפְּרוּ (hiphil pf 3mp from יָסַף, “they add to the pain”) based on the Syriac and LXX (προσέθηκαν: aorist active indicative 3pl from προσέθισμι, “to increase”) renderings. The Targum, Aquila, Symmachus, and Jerome seem to align with the MT. Overall, the weight of evidence is fairly balanced, though the MT may be a slightly more difficult reading and thus perhaps should be taken as original.

53:4)⁶⁶ by others and known (יָדַע) by oneself (2 Chron 6:29) or by God (Exod 3:7). A person can “increase” (יִוְסִיף) מְכָאוֹב by “increasing knowledge” (תַּעֲתַת) Eccl 1:18). מְכָאוֹב also occurs as a subject in verbless clauses with the predicates אָנֹוֹשׁ (Jer 30:15, אָנֹוֹשׁ מְכָאוֹב “your pain is incurable”), נִגְדִי תָמִיד (Ps 38:18[17], וּמְכָאוֹבֵי נִגְדִי תָמִיד “and my pains are always before me”), and לְרָשָׁע (Ps 32:10, לְרָשָׁעִים מְכָאוֹבִים לְרָשָׁע “many pains are for the wicked”).⁶⁷ In Eccl 2:23, מְכָאוֹבִים is predicated of a person’s days (כָּל־יָמָיו מְכָאוֹבִים “all his days are pains”). מְכָאוֹב also occurs as a genitive in construct with the noun אִישׁ (Isa 53:3), in the phrase מְכָאוֹבוֹת אִישׁ “a man of pains.”

The noun מְכָאוֹב appears elsewhere as the object of a preposition. מְכָאוֹב occurs with the preposition עַל introducing the complement of the verb יָסַף (“to add”): כִּי־יִסַּף יְהוָה: יָסַף עַל־מְכָאוֹבֵי יָחוּךְ “For Yahweh has added grief to my pain” (Jer 45:3). Modifying the verb יָסַף (hoph, “to be reproved”), מְכָאוֹב appears with the prefixed preposition בְּ, designating מְכָאוֹב as the instrument of reproof: הוֹכַח בְּמְכָאוֹב “He is reproved with/by pain” (Job 33:19). In Jer 51:8, מְכָאוֹב is the object of לְ after the verb לָקַח, indicating interest or benefit (*dativus commodi*): קַחוּ צָרִי לְמְכָאוֹבָהּ: “Take balm for her pain.”⁶⁸

מְכָאוֹב appears twice in Lam 1:12, first in a clause with the particle of existence (יֵשׁ מְכָאוֹב “there is pain”) and then as the object of the preposition כִּי that modifies the phrase יֵשׁ מְכָאוֹב. The whole phrase is part of a conditional clause, introduced by אִם, that

⁶⁶ מְכָאוֹבֵינוּ is the antecedent of the 3mp direct object pronoun suffixed to the verb סָבַל (“to carry”): סָבַל מְכָאוֹבֵינוּ “Our pains, he carried them.”

⁶⁷ The translation “many are the pains of the wicked” (see ESV, NASB, NIV) would require the syntax מְכָאוֹבֵי רָשָׁע or הַמְכָאוֹבִים לְרָשָׁע (Joüon §141b). The adjective רָשָׁע sometimes precedes the noun it modifies. See Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Psalms*, trans. Francis Bolton (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1889), 1:399; John Goldingay, *Psalms*, BCOTWP (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 1:452; Peter C. Craigie and Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 1–50*, Word Biblical Commentary (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 264.

⁶⁸ Williams §271a; *IBHS* §11.2.10d.

functions as the object of the verb רָאָה (“to see”): הִבִּיטוּ וּרְאוּ אִם־גַּשׁ מִכְּאוֹב כְּמִכְּאֹבִי: “Look and see if there is pain like my pain” (Lam 1:12). The request of the speaker, personified Jerusalem, suggests that מִכְּאוֹב here refers to something observable (“see if there is pain”), and thus possibly physical pain,⁶⁹ and that perhaps there can be various types or levels of severity of מִכְּאוֹב (“pain like my pain”). The noun מִכְּאֹבִי is then followed by two relative clauses that provide further information about Jerusalem’s מִכְּאוֹב, each introduced by the relative pronoun אֲשֶׁר הוּגְדָה יְהוָה בְּיוֹם (‘‘which was dealt out to me’’) and אֲשֶׁר עוֹלַל לִי: אֲשֶׁר הוּגְדָה יְהוָה בְּיוֹם אֲפֹן (‘‘with which Yahweh caused grief on the day of his fierce anger’’). These clauses indicate that a person’s מִכְּאוֹב can be inflicted from the outside. Given that the speaker is personified Jerusalem, מִכְּאוֹב here refers not simply to the physical or emotional pain of an individual but to the pain inflicted by Yahweh on the people of Jerusalem as a whole in his judgment.

In some instances, a cause of the מִכְּאוֹב is explicitly mentioned or can be identified from the context. In Exod 3:7, it can be inferred that the people’s מִכְּאוֹב is the result of Egyptian taskmasters enslaving the people of Israel. Babylon’s מִכְּאוֹב (Jer 51:8) is the result of her having ‘‘fallen’’ (נָפְלָה) and ‘‘been broken/shattered’’ (תִּשְׁבַּר). Ecclesiastes 1:18 suggests that the increasing of knowledge can also increase מִכְּאוֹב (וַיִּזְכֹּר יָדַעַת יוֹסֵף מִכְּאוֹב).

As Lam 1:12 reveals, מִכְּאוֹב can be inflicted by God. In Ps 69:27[26], the phrase מִכְּאֹב

⁶⁹ Christian Frevel, however, suggests that the term should be interpreted ‘‘less as physical pain’’ but rather as ‘‘a term that expresses the result of the social consequences of illness, isolation, grief, etc. in an almost indexical way’’ (‘‘weniger als physischen Schmerz deuten, sondern als Terminus auffasst, der geradezu indexalisch das Ergebnis der sozialen Folgen von Krankheit, Isolation, Trauer, etc. zum Ausdruck bringt’’) (Frevel, ‘‘Seht meinen Schmerz,’’ 84). Frevel’s hesitance to interpret this as a reference to physical pain seems to be based on an assumption that because pain is subjective, it is incommunicable. Thus, for Frevel, מִכְּאוֹב cannot refer to the feeling of pain, but must describe a more concrete situation that points to pain. However, the fact that pain is subjective does not mean מִכְּאוֹב has no objective referent, whether that is physical or emotional pain.

קָלַלְתִּי suggests that מְכָאוֹב here may refer specifically to physical pain resulting from being “pierced” or “wounded” (קָלַל). Elsewhere, מְכָאוֹב is a means of reproving or rebuking a person (Job 33:19, וְהוֹכַח בְּמִכְאוֹב עַל־מִשְׁפָּכוֹ); though the agent of reproof is here unspecified, it is plausible that God is the implied actor.

Parallel Words

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the frequency of occurrences in poetic texts, מְכָאוֹב is often found in parallelism. Parallel terms include: כָּעַס “vexation” (Eccl 1:18; 2:23), רִיב “strife” (Job 33:19), חָלִי “sickness” (Isa 53:4), and שָׁבַר “hurt” (Jer 30:15). In other contexts, מְכָאוֹב is part of a phrase that is parallel with another word or phrase:

נִבְזָה וְנִחְדַּל אִישִׁים “despised and abandoned by men” // אִישׁ מְכָאוֹבוֹת (Isa 53:3)
 וַיְדוּעַ חָלִי “knowing sickness” // אִישׁ מְכָאוֹבוֹת (Isa 53:3)
 אָנֹכִי לְצָלַע נָכוֹן “I am ready to stumble” // וּמְכָאוֹבֵי נִגְדֵי תְמִיד (Ps 38:18[17])
 סָפַר אֶל־מְכָאוֹב “persecute” // רָדַף (Ps 69:27[26])

In Ps 32:10, the phrase רַבִּים מְכָאוֹבִים לְרִשָׁע is parallel with הַבּוֹטֵחַ בַּיְהוָה חֶסֶד יִסּוּבְכֶנּוּ, creating a contrast between the “many pains” (מְכָאוֹבִים) that are experienced by the wicked and the “steadfast love” (חֶסֶד) that surrounds the one who trusts in Yahweh. In its narrative contexts, מְכָאוֹב is found alongside עָנִי “affliction” (Exod 3:7), צָעֲקָה “cry” (Exod 3:7), and נָגַע “affliction, stroke” (2 Chron 6:29). In Jer 45:3, יָגוֹן “sorrow” is “added to” מְכָאוֹב. The variety of co-referential terms confirms that מְכָאוֹב can be used in reference to various types of pain, with some parallels suggesting a reference to psychological pain (כָּעַס, Eccl 1:18; 2:23) and others to physical pain (חָלִי, Isa 53:3, 4; שָׁבַר, Jer 30:15; נָגַע, 2 Chron 6:29).

Post-Biblical Hebrew

The noun מְכָאוֹב appears in Ben Sira 3:27, where it is the subject of the verb רָבָה (“to be or become many, numerous”): “Many are the sorrows of a hard heart; and he that is confident addeth iniquity to iniquity.”⁷⁰ מְכָאוֹב is used again in Sir 34:20 in a verbless clause (מְכָאוֹב...עַם אִישׁ כְּסִיל) (“pain is...with the foolish man”) and in Sir 38:7 as the object of the verb נוּחַ (hiph): “By them doth the physician assuage pain; and likewise the apothecary maketh a confection.”⁷¹

The noun מְכָאוֹב also occurs multiple times in Qumran manuscripts. In 4QHod^a 8:2, מְכָאוֹב is used alongside נָגַע, apparently in a construct phrase that is the direct object of the verb שָׁכַח: “And I forgot my painful affliction.”⁷² It occurs again alongside נָגַע in 1QH^a 17:6:

6 ואני משאה {א} למשוואה וממכאוב	“6 And as for me, from ruin to devastation,
לנגע ומחבלם 7 למשברים תשוהה	and from pain to affliction, and from
נפשי בנפלאותיכה	tribulations 7 to breakers, my soul
	contemplates your wonders.” ⁷³

מְכָאוֹב may also occur with נָגַע in one other fragmentary text, 1QH^a 22:23:

[... מנגי]עי גבר וממכא[וב אנוש]	“[... the afflic]tions of a man and from the
	suffer[ing of a person].” ⁷⁴

⁷⁰ Translation from Schechter and Taylor, xvi.

⁷¹ Translation from Schechter and Taylor, xlv.

⁷² Translation from James H. Charlesworth et al., eds., *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Hebrew Aramaic, and Greek Texts with English Translations*, vol. 5A, *Thanksgiving Hymns and Related Documents* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2022), 263.

⁷³ Charlesworth et al., *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, 5A:173.

⁷⁴ Eileen M. Schuller and Carol A. Newsom, *The Hodayot (Thanksgiving Psalms): A Study Edition of 1QH^a* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012), 69.

In 11QPs^a 19:15, מְאֹיֵב occurs in combination with ויצר רע “evil purpose” as the subject of the verb ירשׁ:

15 אל תשלט בי שטן ורוח טמאה “Let not Satan rule over me, nor an evil
מכאוב ויצר 16 רע אל ירשׁ spirit; let neither pain nor evil purpose 16
בעצמי take possession of my bones.”⁷⁵

מְאֹיֵב may also appear in a fragmentary text (4QapLam^a 1.1:14) modified by the adjective לאנושׁ “incurable” (לאנושׁ למכאובנו), though the text למכאובנו has apparently been altered by a copyist to מכתינו “our wounds.”⁷⁶ These texts overall suggest that as in its biblical usage, מְאֹיֵב in post-biblical texts has the sense “pain” and functions as a general term that can refer to physical or emotional pain.

Semantic Conclusions

מְאֹיֵב can be used to describe both physical and psychological pain with various causes. In some contexts, the psychological aspect appears more prominently (Eccl 1:18; 2:23), while in others, a physical notion is likely in view (Ps 69:27[26]; Exod 3:7; 2 Chron 6:29; Isa 53:3, 4). In some contexts, מְאֹיֵב seems to denote physical pain but is used metaphorically to describe a nation’s suffering caused by God’s judgment (Jer 30:15; 51:8; Lam 1:12, 18). Elsewhere, the referent remains somewhat ambiguous, as either physical or psychological pain could be in view (Job 33:19; Ps 38:18[17]). Pains can be “many” (Ps 32:10), constantly present (“always before me,” Psalm 38:18[17]), or “incurable” (Jer 30:15). Together, the various uses suggest that מְאֹיֵב is an abstract term

⁷⁵ Martínez and Tigchelaar, 1174. Though it is fragmentary, another text (11Q6 4–5:16) seems to echo these words and perhaps represents another occurrence of מְאֹיֵב (Martínez and Tigchelaar, 1181).

⁷⁶ Martínez and Tigchelaar, 368. מְאֹיֵב also appears in 1QpHab 11:15, but the other words in the clause where it occurs are missing (Martínez and Tigchelaar, 20).

with the broad sense “pain” that can be applied to a variety of referents, whether physical or emotional suffering.

עצב

The root עצב is found 34 times in the OT. The verb עצב occurs 15 times, while six related nouns occur 19 times: עָצַב (6x), עֲצָבָה (5x), עֲצָב (3x), עֲצָבוֹן (3x), מְעַצְבָּה (1x), and עֲצָב/עֲצָב (1x).

עֲצָב

Morphology

Hebrew

The verb עצב occurs in the qal (3x), niph'al (7x), piel (2x), hiph'il (1x), and hithpa'el (2x). In addition to its 15 occurrences in the OT, עצב appears once in Ben Sira (14:1) and once in Qumran texts (4QapLamA 2:6). There is one proposed occurrence of the verb in 2 Sam 13:21, in the inserted phrase וְלֹא עָצַב אֶת־רוּחַ אֲמִנוֹן בְּנֵוֹ.⁷⁷ The insertion is found in a manuscript from the Dead Sea Scrolls (4Q51), which adds [וְלֹא עָצַב אֶת רוּחַ אֲמִנוֹן בְּנֵוֹ כִּי [אֵהָבֵוּ כִּי בְכוֹרֵוֹ הוּא] him, because he was his firstborn.”⁷⁸ The addition is also found in the LXX.⁷⁹ F. M. Cross, et al. suggest that this expression is original and was lost from the MT through

⁷⁷ BDB, s.v. “עָצַב”; DCH, s.v. “עָצַב I.”

⁷⁸ Frank Moore Cross et al., *Qumran Cave 4.XII:1–2 Samuel*, DJD XVII (Oxford: Clarendon, 2005), 149.

⁷⁹ καὶ οὐκ ἐλύπησεν τὸ πνεῦμα Ἀμνῶν τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ ὅτι ἠγάπα αὐτόν, ὅτι πρωτότοκος αὐτοῦ ἦν.

haplography (ולוא...ולוא).⁸⁰ However, the suggestion of Tsumura, that “it seems more natural that this was added later to the LXX to explain David’s action, or rather lack of action,” is likely correct.⁸¹ Thus, this passage has not been included in the analysis of occurrences of עֲצַב for this paper.

Other Semitic Languages

The root עֲצַב has cognates in the Ethiopic *‘aṣaba*, “be difficult, be hard, be harsh, be troublesome, be grievous, be serious,”⁸² and perhaps in the Arabic *gaḍiba*, “to be angry.”⁸³ The root עֲצַב also occurs as a verb in Middle Hebrew and Jewish Aramaic with the sense “to grieve.”⁸⁴ The related Aramaic word עֲצִיב, a passive participle of עֲצַב, occurs in Dan 6:21 in the phrase בְּקֵל עֲצִיב “in a pained voice,” a phrase that also appears in the Aramaic Targum of Esth 4:1 and Targum Jonathan of Exod 12:31.

⁸⁰ Cross et al., 149.

⁸¹ David Tsumura, *The Second Book of Samuel*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019), 211. Tsumura writes that “Herbert notes that this reconstruction of the Hebrew text of 4QSam^a following the LXX is not necessarily correct” (Tsumura, *Second Book of Samuel*, 211, referencing Edward D. Herbert, *Reconstructing Biblical Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Method Applied to the Reconstruction of 4QSam^a* [Leiden: Brill, 1997], 155–56).

⁸² Wolf Leslau, *Comparative Dictionary of Ge‘ez (Classical Ethiopic): Ge‘ez-English/English-Ge‘ez, with an Index of the Semitic Roots* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1987), 74; BDB, s.v. “עֲצַב”; see also August Dillman, *Lexicon Linguae Aethiopicae* (Leipzig: T. O. Weigel, 1865), 1019, “be hard, difficult, arduous, troublesome.”

⁸³ BDB, s.v. “עֲצַב”; HALOT, s.v. “עֲצַב II.”

⁸⁴ HALOT, s.v. “עֲצַב II.”

Syntax

Qal

In the qal, the verb עִצַּב is used three times, including once as a participle. In two occurrences, עִצַּב is transitive (1 Kgs 1:6; 1 Chron 4:10), with the syntax:

<a> עִצַּב “b grieved/caused pain to a.”

In both passages, the verb is active and the object of the verb designates the one experiencing pain/grief (a-element), while the subject is the actor, or the one inflicting it (b-element). In the third occurrence, the verb appears as a passive participle, with the syntax:

עִצֻבִּית <a> “a was pained/grieved.”

The passive participle is used attributively to modify אִשָּׁה, in a construct phrase with the noun רוּחַ רֵוַח וְנִעְצֻבֵת רוּחַ: רֵוַח “Like a wife abandoned and pained/grieved in spirit” (Isa 54:6).

Niphal

In the niphal, the syntax of the verb עִצַּב is intransitive:

<a> נִעְצַב “a was in pain/grieved.”

Three times, the verb appears with a modifying prepositional phrase. The prepositions אֶל (1 Sam 20:34) and עַל (2 Sam 2:19) both designate the object on account of which or concerning which the a-element experiences pain/grief:

<c> אֶל/עַל נִעְצַב <a> “a was in pain for/on account of c.”

Once, נִעְצַב is accompanied by an instrumental phrase with the preposition בְּ (Eccl 10:9):

<d> בְּ נִעְצַב <a> “a was in pain with/by d.”

The d-element represents the instrument by means of which the a-element experiences pain.

Piel

עצב occurs twice in the piel, with the transitive syntax:

<a> עצב “b hurt/grieved a.”

In the piel, as in the qal, the object of the verb usually indicates the one experiencing the pain/grief (a-element), while the subject indicates the actor(s) causing the pain/grief (b-element).

Hiphil

The verb עצב occurs only once in the hiphil, with syntax similar to the piel and qal. The hiphil of עצב is transitive and seems to have a causative sense. In the lone hiphil occurrence, the verb is modified by the preposition בְּ:

<e> בְּ <a> העציב “b grieved/caused pain to a in e.”

In this syntax, the e-element designates a location in which the verbal action takes place: יַעֲצִיבוּהוּ בְּיַשְׁמֹון “They grieved him in the wilderness” (Ps 78:40).

Hithpael

עצב occurs twice in the hithpael, both times with intransitive syntax similar to the niphal:

<a> התעצב “a was in pain/was grieved.”

In one text, the verb is accompanied by the preposition אֶל, with the sense “to, into” (Gen 6:6). The usage here is probably metaphorical: וַיִּתְעַצֵּב אֶל-לְבוֹ “And he was pained/grieved into/unto his heart”⁸⁵ likely implies he was grieved “greatly.”⁸⁶

Associative Field

Contexts of Use

עֲצַב appears most often in narrative literature (10x). It also occurs in poetic texts, including prophetic poetry (Isa 54:6; 63:10), Psalms (56:6[5]; 78:40), and wisdom literature (Eccl 10:9).

Syntagmatic Relations

Most commonly, the a-element—the one experiencing pain—with the verb עֲצַב is a person or group of people (11x). Three times, the a-element is God, including one occurrence where it is his Holy Spirit (Isa 63:10). Once, in what is probably a metaphorical or extended use of עֲצַב, the a-element is an abstract object (דְּבָרִי, “my cause,” Ps 56:6[5]).

When a b-element, the agent causing pain, is specified, it is generally a person. People cause pain to a person’s words/cause (דְּבָרִי, Ps 56:6[5]) and to God (Ps 78:40; Isa

⁸⁵ BDB, s.v. “אֶל.”

⁸⁶ See *DCH*, s.v. “אֶל.”

63:10);⁸⁷ only once does a human cause grief/pain to another human (1 Kgs 1:6).⁸⁸ In one occurrence, the implied b-element is probably an abstract concept, רָעָה “evil, harm, trouble.” This is seen in Jabez’s prayer: “Oh that you would truly bless me, and you would enlarge my border, and your hand would be with me, and you would keep me from harm [רָעָה] so as to not cause me pain [לְבַלְתִּי עֲצָבִי]!” (1 Chron 4:10).⁸⁹ Here, the verb עֲצָבִי

⁸⁷ In two of the three occurrences where God is the a-element, the Israelites are identified as the ones causing his grief/pain, through their rebellion in the wilderness (Isa 63:10; Ps 78:40).

⁸⁸ In 1 Kgs 1:6, both the a- and b-elements are humans (Adonijah and David), though here the verb is negated (לֹא עֲצָבוּ אָבִיו). Some have proposed reading לֹא עֲצָרוּ “he did not restrain him,” in place of לֹא עֲצָבוּ “he did not pain him/cause him grief,” apparently on the basis of the LXX (Codex Vaticanus), which reads οὐκ ἀπεκόλυπεν αὐτόν “he did not hinder him” (see BDB, s.v. “עֲצָב”). The Lucianic recension reads ἐπιτιμάω “rebuke,” which would correspond to MT עֲצָב. One potential piece of evidence against reading לֹא עֲצָרוּ, suggested by Burney, is the “following עֲשִׂיתָ which, as used of a past event, is opposed to the notion of holding back *before* an action” (C. F. Burney, *Notes on the Hebrew Text of the Books of Kings* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1903], 3). In other words, the meaning “he did not restrain him” would not fit as well in the context of the verse: וְלֹא עֲצָבוּ אָבִיו מִיָּמָיו לְאִמֶּר מִדּוּעַ כָּכָה עֲשִׂיתָ “And his father had never *עֲצָב* him by saying, ‘Why have you done thus?’” Probably, then, it is best to retain the MT in light of the context. DeVries suggests that the Codex Vaticanus reading of the verb עֲצָר may be “a very early error since it is in the pre-exilic Canaanite script that כ and ר appear the most alike” (Simon J. DeVries, *1 Kings*, Word Biblical Commentary [Waco, TX: Word Books, 1985], 4; see further discussion there). Most translations and commentators seem to take the verb as עֲצָבוּ, though translations vary widely: “his father never at any time displeased him” (ESV; see also RSV; KJV; Mordechai Cogan, *1 Kings: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Yale Bible [New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001], 157); “his father had never rebuked him at any time” (NASB, NIV; NKJV); “his father had never corrected him” (NET); “his father had never troubled him” (C. F. Keil, *The Books of the Kings*, trans. James Martin [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1883], 18); “his father had never offended him” (Walter A. Maier III, *1 Kings I–II* [Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2018], 219).

⁸⁹ Heb. וְעֲשִׂיתָ מִרְעָה לְבַלְתִּי עֲצָבִי. The phrase וְעֲשִׂיתָ מִרְעָה לְבַלְתִּי עֲצָבִי is somewhat difficult, as the verb עֲשִׂה with the preposition מִן might suggest a partitive sense, “do some harm,” which would make little sense in this context. On the basis of Isa 26:28 (יִשְׂוֹעַת בְּלִיַּעֲשָׂה אֲרִיז), Rudolph and BHS margin suggest inserting יִשְׂוֹעַתִּי after וְעֲשִׂיתָ, proposing the word may have been omitted by haplography (see Wilhelm Rudolph, *Chronikbücher*, HAT 21 [Tübingen: Mohr (Siebeck), 1955], 30); this would lead to the reading “perform my salvation from harm.” However, the proposed parallel with Isa 26:28 does not seem to provide a sufficient basis for the insertion. There are other difficulties in the verse, including the absence of the expected apodosis in Jabez’s prayer following the opening clause, which begins with the conditional particle אִם introducing a protasis, and the unusual form עֲצָבִי, where one might expect עֲצָבוֹ, among others. For further discussion of this passage, see Ralph W. Klein, *1 Chronicles: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 124, 132–33; Gary L. Knoppers, *1 Chronicles 1–9: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 2003), 339, 346; Sara Japhet, *I & II Chronicles*, Old Testament Library (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993), 108–11.

is an infinitive construct; most likely the 1cs suffix is the object (a-element) and the implied actor (b-element) is רַעַה: “that it may not pain me.”⁹⁰

In stems where the verb’s sense is more stative than causative, such as the niphāl, a reason or cause for the state of grief/pain can be specified using other means. Twice in the niphāl, עֲצַב occurs with prepositional phrases designating the object (c-element) on account of which the a-element experiences pain/grief (1 Sam 20:34; 2 Sam 19:3[2]); in both cases, the c-element is a human. For example, in 2 Sam 19:3[2], the a-element is הַמֶּלֶךְ, referring to David, while the c-element, the object of the preposition עַל, is בְּנוֹ “his son,” Absalom, who has just died: נִעְצַב הַמֶּלֶךְ עַל-בְּנוֹ “The king was grieving for/on account of his son.”⁹¹ Elsewhere, a reason for the grief/pain is indicated contextually. In 1 Sam 20:3, for example, the sequence אַל-יַדְעֵנָא יְהוֹנָתָן פֶּן-יַעֲצַב “do not let Jonathan know this, lest יַעֲצַב” indicates that Jonathan’s awareness of “this”—a reference to Saul’s plot to kill David—would cause Jonathan grief/pain.⁹² In the context of Neh 8:10, 11, where both

⁹⁰ BDB, s.v. “עֲצַב” (emphasis original); see also ESV, KJV, NASB. Some translators, however, take the 1cs suffix on the infinitive construct in a subjective sense. The verb is then taken as having a more stative rather than an active or causative sense: “keep me from harm so that I will be free from pain” (NIV); “keep me from harm so I might not endure pain” (NET). The NKJV takes the suffix as subjective while also retaining the active/causative sense of the verb: “you would keep me from evil, that I may not cause pain.”

⁹¹ Similarly, in 1 Sam 20, when Saul becomes indignant towards Jonathan after David’s absence from a meal and makes clear his plot to kill David, we read that Jonathan “rose from the table with fierce anger and did not eat food the second day of the month because he was pained/grieved for David [בְּיָ נִעְצַב אֶל-דָּוִד], because his father had humiliated him” (1 Sam 20:34). Here, the preposition אֶל designates the object in regard to, concerning, or on account of which Jonathan is experiencing pain/grief. The reason for Jonathan’s grief concerning David is further specified in the explanatory clause בְּיָ הִקְלִמוֹ אָבִיו, that is, because Saul had treated David shamefully.

⁹² Saul’s prediction of Jonathan’s response (יַעֲצַב) proves to be correct in 1 Sam 20:34, where we are told that Jonathan נִעְצַב אֶל-דָּוִד “was pained/grieved on account of/for David.” A somewhat similar case, where the reason for grief is unspecified syntactically, is found in Gen 34:7, where עֲצַב (hithpael) describes the response of Jacob’s sons hearing the news of Dinah’s rape by Shechem: “and the sons of Jacob came from the field when they heard, and the men וְהָרַעְצָבוּ and were very angry, because he had done a disgraceful folly in Israel by lying with the daughter of Jacob, for such a thing is not done” (Gen 34:7). Again, no b-element or c-element is explicitly stated, but it is clear that the reason for or object of their grief/pain is the news of their sister Dinah’s rape.

Nehemiah and the Levites issue injunctions for the people to not be in pain/grieve (עצב), along with weeping and mourning, appear to be the people's response to hearing the words of the Law read aloud.⁹³

In many passages, the specific elements with which עצב is combined in the context generally suggest that the verb describes some kind of psychological or emotional pain or grief. In Eccl 10:9, however, the syntagmatic relations suggest that עצב may also have a physical sense. Here, the a-element is a person, specifically מְסִיעַ אֲבָנִים: “the one who quarries stones.” Modifying the verb is the instrumental prepositional phrase בָּהֶם, whose 3mp pronoun suffix refers to אֲבָנִים “stones.” The whole clause reads: מְסִיעַ אֲבָנִים יַעֲצֹב בָּהֶם. “The one who quarries stones יַעֲצֹב by them.” With the object “stones” functioning as the instrument of the verbal action/state, יַעֲצֹב most likely has a sense related to physical pain, “be hurt.”⁹⁴ The parallel clause similarly depicts a possible case of physical pain or injury: בֹּקֵעַ עֵצִים יִסְכֶּן בָּם. “The one who cleaves wood may endanger himself by it.”

Parallel Words

The verb עצב is found twice in combination with the verb חרה “to burn, be kindled be angry,”⁹⁵ indicating that a situation that causes anger can also be a situation where one

⁹³ See also Gen 6:6, where one can infer from the context that the cause of Yahweh's great pain/grief (hithpael) is his seeing that “the evil of mankind was great in the land, and every purpose of the thoughts of his heart was only evil always” (Gen 6:5, Heb. בָּרָא יְהוָה כִּי רַבָּה רַעַת הָאָדָם בְּאָרֶץ וְכָל-יִצְרָל מַחְשַׁבַת לִבּוֹ בָק רַע כָּל- הַיּוֹם).

⁹⁴ A physical sense may also form the basis of the usage of עצב in Ps 56:6[5], where the psalmist laments, “all day [my enemies] cause pain to my cause” (כָּל-הַיּוֹם דָּבְרֵי יַעֲצֹבוּ).

⁹⁵ BDB, s.v. “חָרָה”; DCH, s.v. “חרה I.”

feels pain/grief (עצב).⁹⁶ The hithpael of עצב appears alongside נהם (niph, “to be sorry, regret”): “And Yahweh regretted that he had made man on the earth, and he was pained unto his heart” (Gen 6:6). The juxtaposition of עצב with these various terms suggests that עצב likely has an emotional nuance in these contexts. While not syntactically parallel, the terms אבל and בכה are twice found in the immediate context of עצב and are seemingly co-referential with עצב (2 Sam 19:3[2]; Neh 8:9–10),⁹⁷ again suggesting עצב may refer in these contexts to emotional pain.

Elsewhere, עצב (hiphil) is parallel with מרה, “to be rebellious” (Ps 78:40), suggesting that it was by rebelling against him that Israel caused pain or grief to God: “How often they were rebellious against him in the wilderness, they pained him [יַעֲצִיבוּהוּ] in the desert.” In Neh 8:10, the command אַל־תִּעֲצְבוּ “do not be grieved” is followed by a clause giving the reason for the exhortation, which sets עצב in contrast to קִי־קִדְוֹת: קִדְוֹתָהּ “For the joy of Yahweh, it is your strength.”

Post-Biblical Hebrew

אשרי אנוש לא עצבו פיהו ולא אבה עליו דין לבו: 14:1 in Ben Sira 14:1. עצב appears in the qal in Ben Sira 14:1: “Blessed is the man whose mouth does not hurt him, and his heart does not consent to judgment against him.”⁹⁸ In the DSS, עצב occurs as a qal passive participle functioning

⁹⁶ In Gen 34:7, עצב appears in the hithpael alongside the expression מָאֵד לָהֶם מָאֵד “and the men burned with anger.” In Gen 45:5, the negated niphil jussive of the second person, אַל־תִּעֲצְבוּ, occurs in combination with the expression וְאַל־יִחַר בְּעֵינֵיכֶם “and now, do not let there be anger in your eyes.”

⁹⁷ Following Absalom’s death, in 2 Sam 19:2[1], Joab is told הִנֵּה הַמֶּלֶךְ בֹּכֶה וַיִּתְאַבֵּל עַל־אַבְשָׁלוֹם “behold, the king is weeping and he is mourning for Absalom”; in 19:3[2], the people hear הַמֶּלֶךְ עֹלֵי־בְנוֹ “the king is grieving for his son.”

⁹⁸ For this translation of the second line in this verse, see *DCH*, s.v. “אבה.”

substantively, “grieved one” (4QapLam^a 2:6).⁹⁹ The context seems to be “a poem inspired by the biblical Book of Lamentations,” for which only several fragments are available.¹⁰⁰ In an expression reminiscent of Isa 54:6, עֲצַב is here used alongside a passive form of עָזַב to compare the city of Jerusalem to “a woman hurt and forsaken by her [husband].”¹⁰¹ עֲצַב may also appear in another DSS text in the niph'al, with the a-element לָב and the prepositional phrase “concerning the birthright” (4QJub^h 36:15).¹⁰² From this limited data, it seems that the verb עֲצַב was used in post-biblical Hebrew in ways similar to its biblical usage.

Semantic Conclusions

In the qal, עֲצַב has the sense “to cause pain, to grieve” and can be applied to pain caused by evil or an individual’s grief/pain caused by his father.¹⁰³ The passive qal participle has the sense “to be caused pain/grief, to be grieved.” In the niph'al, the verb has the senses “to be grieved” and “to be hurt” (Eccl 10:9).¹⁰⁴ The piel can have the

⁹⁹ Heb. [כ...אשה עז]בה כעצובה וכעזובת [בע]ל[ה] (John M. Allegro and A. A. Anderson, *Qumran Cave 4.I [4Q158–4Q186]*, DJD V [Oxford: Clarendon, 1968], 77).

¹⁰⁰ Geza Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, 4th ed. (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 248.

¹⁰¹ Translation from Vermes, 248.

¹⁰² According to the reconstruction in *DCH* (s.v. “I עֲצַב”), which would lead to the reading, “my heart was pained/grieved concerning the birthright” (נעצב לבי על הבכורה). I was unable to access the text of 4QJub^h.

¹⁰³ *HALOT* lists the senses “hurt, rebuke” for the qal, while *DCH* offers “grieve, rebuke” for 1 Kgs 1:6 and “hurt” for 1 Chron 4:10 (see also Ges¹⁸). While the idea communicated (i.e., the referent) in 1 Kgs 1:6 may be that David had not rebuked his son, the sense of the verb עֲצַב itself in this context is probably not “rebuke” but “grieve” or “pain.” BDB uses the broader term “pain” for both occurrences (“father had not pained him,” 1 Kgs 1:6; “that it may not pain me,” 1 Chron 4:10).

¹⁰⁴ The lexica generally treat עֲצַב in Eccl 10:9 as having a distinct sense from the rest of its uses, “be hurt” (BDB, *DCH*) or “hurt oneself” (*HALOT*, Ges¹⁸).

senses “to cause pain, to hurt” (Ps 56:6[5]) or “to cause grief” (Isa 63:10). The hiphil (Ps 78:40) has a similar sense to the piel in Isa 63:10; both stems are used to describe the same thing: the Israelites causing grief/pain to God by their rebellion against him in the wilderness. In the hithpael, the sense is “to be deeply pained/grieved.” The range of meaning of the verb עצב thus encompasses physical and psychological pain, though the physical sense seems to be used relatively infrequently in the OT (Eccl 10:9; perhaps also in a metaphorical usage, Ps 56:6[5]).¹⁰⁵ In most biblical occurrences, the pain described with the verb עצב seems to be psychological pain, or grief. It can be applied to a variety of referents, including a person’s pain/grief caused by a father’s rebuke or by רָעָה; grief/pain related to mourning; grief/pain associated with anger at a situation; pain/harm caused by others to one’s cause; or God’s pain/grief caused by people’s rebellion.

עָצָב

Morphology

The noun עָצָב occurs six times in the OT, as well as once in post-biblical Hebrew. The noun is masculine and can be singular or plural.

¹⁰⁵ It is interesting that the verb עצב, which most frequently seems to describe non-physical pain, is used in Eccl 10:9, particularly given that the verb נָצַב, as noted above, also occurs with a prepositional phrase whose object is אֲבָנִים “stones” (2 Kgs 3:19). While the referent is different in each passage—since the one who quarries stones is injuring himself by means of the stones, while in 2 Kgs 3 stones are the means by which people harm/injure a portion of land—nevertheless, the occurrence of both verbs with the same instrument suggests that perhaps there could be some overlap in their senses in these contexts.

Syntactic Function

The noun עֶצֶב functions as the object of prepositions, as the object of a verb, and as a subject in a verbless clause. It occurs three times as the genitive in a construct phrase. עֶצֶב is usually indefinite but takes a pronominal suffix in one occurrence.

Associative Field

Contexts of Use

All occurrences of עֶצֶב in the OT are in poetical texts. The majority of uses are in wisdom contexts, including four occurrences in Proverbs and one in a Psalm which has a “Proverbs-like form”¹⁰⁶ and is attributed to Solomon (לְיִשְׁלֹמֹה, Ps 127:1). The noun also occurs once in Genesis.

Syntagmatic Relations

The noun עֶצֶב occurs in a variety of syntactical combinations. עֶצֶב is used three times in construct phrases, functioning as the genitive with the constructs כָּל, לְהֵם, and דְּבָר. The genitive phrase דְּבַר-עֶצֶב appears as the subject of the verb עלה (hiph): וַדְּבַר-עֶצֶב יַעֲלֶה-אָרָף “But a word of עֶצֶב stirs up anger” (Prov 15:1). In this syntactical combination, עֶצֶב seems to have the sense “pain” or “hurt” and functions as an attributive genitive: “a word of hurt” = “a painful/hurtful word.” The plural עֶצְבִּים occurs with לְהֵם and a

¹⁰⁶ Delitzsch, *Proverbs*, 1:292. Delitzsch notes that, “like the proverb-song, the extended form of the *Mashal*,” Psalm 127 “consists of a double string of proverbs, the expression of which reminds one in many ways of the Book of Proverbs...and which together are like the unfolding of the proverb, ch. x. 22: *The blessing of Jahve, it maketh rich, and labour addeth nothing beside it*” (Delitzsch, *Proverbs*, 1:292 [emphasis original]). Delitzsch points to a number of expressions in Psalm 127 that are reminiscent of Proverbs, including עֶצְבִּים, “toilsome efforts, as in Prov. v. 10”; מְאֻחָרִי, found in Ps 127:2 and Prov 23:30; and בְּנֵי הַנְּעוּרִים (Ps 127:4), “sons begotten in one’s youth, as in Prov. v. 18, אִשְׁתׁ נְעוּרַיִם, a wife married in one’s youth” (1:292).

participle of the verb אכל in the construct phrase אֲכָלִי לֶחֶם הַעֲצָבִים “[you] who eat of the bread of הַעֲצָבִים” (Ps 127:2). In Prov 14:23, the phrase כָּל-עֵצָב is the object of the preposition בְּ, designating accompaniment, with the verb יהיה מוֹתֵר: “In all עֵצָב there is profit.” עֵצָב also occurs as the object of בְּ with the verb ילד בְּנֵי: “In/with עֵצָב you will bring forth children” (Gen 3:16). The contexts of both Prov 14:23 and Ps 127:2 suggest that in these passages עֵצָב has the sense “toil, labor,” or perhaps specifically “painful toil,” while in Gen 3:16 the sense may be “pain” or “toil.”¹⁰⁷ In Prov 5:10, the noun is plural and has a 2ms pronoun suffix, thus referring to a specific person’s עֲצָבִים. עֲצָבִיךָ functions as the subject in a verbless clause: “And your עֲצָבִים [be] in the house of a foreigner.”¹⁰⁸ עֵצָב here is probably “toil,” or, as Delitzsch suggests, “difficult work,” and, by metonymy, “that which is obtained by it.”¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ See further discussion below.

¹⁰⁸ It is somewhat unclear what verb should be filled in with this verbless clause. In Hebrew poetry, it is possible in parallel lines for the verb in the first line to be implicit in the second line. The previous clause in this context reads כָּוֶן יִשְׁבְּעוּ נָרִים כְּתֹהֵב “lest strangers have their fill [שבוע] of your strength.” However, carrying over this verb from the first line (שבוע) into the second line, “and your עֲצָבִיךָ בְּבֵית נֹכְרִי (“and your עֲצָבִים have their fill in the house of a foreigner”), “disturbs the parallelism” (Delitzsch, *Proverbs*, 1:124) and would make little sense, in part because the second line provides no object for שבוע. Some translators supply verbs such as “go to” (ESV, NASB) or simply “be” (KJV, NJPS), while others provide a more specific verb such as “benefit” (NET) or “enrich” (NIV). Delitzsch suggests the expression can be “interpreted as a virtual predicate,” presenting 5:10b as “an independent prohibitive clause” (*Proverbs*, 1:124): “may your labors not be in the house of strangers.” Mordechai Zer-Kavod translates “and your labors be in the house of a foreigner” but suggests this “is an abridged form, missing the understood ‘be eaten’ which would parallel ‘be satiated’” (Mordechai Zer-Kavod and Yehudah Kil, *The Bible: Proverbs with the Jerusalem Commentary*, trans. Albert Milton Kanter and Yocheved Engelberg Cohen [Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 2014], 40n18); he cites in comparison Hos 7:9; Deut 28:33; and Jer 3:25 and proposes the meaning is “the fruits of your toil and efforts will be eaten in the house of a foreigner...to whom you will have been sold as a slave” (40). This is plausible, though perhaps the more minimal proposal of Delitzsch should be preferred.

¹⁰⁹ Delitzsch, *Proverbs*, 1:124; see also Fox, who writes that עֲצָבִיךָ “your toil” means “pain or painful labor...It may also refer to the product of toil, that is to say, wealth” (*Proverbs 1–9*, 195); Waltke similarly translates “your strenuous labors” and suggests that here the term “is a metonymy for acquisitions gained by hard work” (Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 1:1–15:29* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004], 313).

In Prov 10:22, עֲצָב could function as either the object or the subject of the verb יִסֶּף (hiph): בְּרִכַּת יְהוָה הִיא תַעֲשִׂיר וְלֹא יִוָּסֵף עֲצָב עִמָּה “The blessing of Yahweh will make rich, and he will not add עֲצָב to it”¹¹⁰ or “the blessing of Yahweh will make rich, and עֲצָב will not add to it.”¹¹¹ If עֲצָב is the object of יִסֶּף, then עֲצָב would most likely have the sense “pain” or “sorrow” (“he will not add pain/sorrow to it”).¹¹² If עֲצָב is the subject, the sense “toil” would be more fitting (“toil will not add to it”).¹¹³ The fact that the preposition עִם (עִמָּה) is used to modify the verb יִסֶּף in this verse suggests that perhaps the second option (“toil”) should be preferred. As Delitzsch notes, the first option, “that God adds to His blessing no sorrow... would require the word עֲלֵיָהּ” to modify the verb יִסֶּף (hiph), rather than עִמָּה.¹¹⁴ Thus, the meaning is probably that “trouble, labor, i.e., strenuous self-endeavors, add not (anything) to [the blessing],” that is, labor “does not associate itself with the blessing... as the *causa efficiens*,” or, if “anything” is supplied as “the complement to עִמָּה [along with it]: nothing is added thereto, which goes along with that which the blessing of

¹¹⁰ See ESV, NET, KJV, NASB.

¹¹¹ See NJPS, NRSVue, ESV margin.

¹¹² But see Waltke, *Proverbs: Chapters 1:1–15:29*, 467, who takes עֲצָב as the object but translates “painful toil” (“and he does not add painful toil with it”).

¹¹³ See Fox, who translates “the Lord’s blessing is what makes one rich, and striving adds nothing more thereto” (Michael V. Fox, *Proverbs 10–31: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Yale Bible [New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009], 522).

¹¹⁴ Delitzsch, *Proverbs*, 1:223. BHS suggests עֲלֵיָהּ should be read in place of עִמָּה but provides no evidence to support the proposal. This is the only passage in the OT where the hiphil of יִסֶּף occurs with the preposition עִם; there may be one example of this syntax in the Dead Sea Scrolls, 1QpHab 6:1 (*DCH*, s.v. “יִסֶּף”). עִם here probably “means ‘in addition to’” and “points to a further (potential) source of wealth. That is, striving is not an additional source of wealth alongside God’s blessing” (Fox, *Proverbs 10–31*, 524). See also Murphy, who understands this verse as affirming “emphatically the activity of the Lord in the achievement of prosperity; the Lord is responsible, not human effort” (Murphy, *Proverbs*, 75).

God grants, and completes it.”¹¹⁵ While עָצַב could be the object of the verb and thus mean “sorrow,” it is probably preferable to read עָצַב as the subject of the verb, with the sense “toil,” based on the unusual combination of יָסַף with עָצַב.

Parallel Words

In Prov 5:10, עֲצָבֶיךָ is parallel with כֹּחֶךָ “your strength,” or perhaps by metonymy here “your wealth, possessions”:

פְּנֵי־יְשׁוּבָעוּ זָרִים כֹּחֶךָ “Lest strangers have their fill of your strength/wealth,
 וְעֲצָבֶיךָ בְּבַיִת נֹכְרִי and your עֲצָבֶיךָ be in the house of a foreigner.”

The parallel suggests that עֲצָבֶיךָ similarly may be a metonymy for the things produced or obtained by עָצַב; both lines refer to the fruit of one’s efforts being given over to and enjoyed by others. The word עָצַב is set in contrast to the phrase דְּבַר־שִׁפְתַיִם in Prov 14:23:

בְּכָל־עָצָב יִהְיֶה מוֹתָר “In all עָצָב there is profit,
 וּדְבַר־שִׁפְתַיִם אֵדִי־לְמַחְסוֹר but the word of lips [tends] only to poverty.”

Here, the “word of lips,” probably designating “purposeless and inoperative talk,”¹¹⁶ or “mere talk,”¹¹⁷ from which nothing is gained, is contrasted with toil (עָצַב), which produces results. Set in contrast to “mere talk,” עָצַב here seems to have a more positive sense than in most of its other uses. In Prov 15:1, a contrast is set up between מְעֹנֶה־רֵךְ “a soft answer” and דְּבַר־עֲצָב “a hurtful word,” which produce opposing effects:

מְעֹנֶה־רֵךְ יָשִׁיב חֲמָה “A soft answer turns away wrath,
 וּדְבַר־עֲצָב יַעֲלֶה־אָף: but a word of עָצַב stirs up anger.”

¹¹⁵ Delitzsch, *Proverbs*, 1:223. Fox notes that the verb הוֹסִיף is frequently used without a direct object; in such cases, “the implied dir. obj. must be extracted from context, as in Deut 4:2 (anything); Qoh 3:14 (anything); Ezra 10:10 (guilt); and Ps 71:14 (blessings)” (524).

¹¹⁶ Delitzsch, *Proverbs*, 1:306. Zer-Kavod similarly describes this as “idle chatter,” noting that “the expression ‘talk of the lips’” (דְּבַר־שִׁפְתַיִם) “is similar to ‘frivolous talk’...meaningless babble” (137n77).

¹¹⁷ Fox, *Proverbs 10–31*, 581; ESV, NIV, NASB; NJPS “idle chatter.”

The parallelism here between *מַעֲנֵה־רֶךְ* and *דְּבַר־עֶצֶב* and their respective effects indicates that *עֶצֶב* is to be understood here in a negative way. In Gen 3:16, the phrase *בְּעֶצֶב תֵּלְדִי בָנִים* “in *עֶצֶב* you will bear children” is parallel with *הֲרַבָּה אֲרַבְּהָ עֶצְבוֹנֶיךָ וְהִרְבֵּיתִי* “I will surely multiply your *עֶצְבוֹנֶיךָ* and your conceptions.”¹¹⁸

Post-Biblical Hebrew

עֶצֶב appears once in the DSS in a fragmentary text (4QPrFêtes^c 16:2), which reads: [...]*בכּוּל עֶצֶב*[יהם...] “[...] in all [their] trouble[s...].”¹¹⁹ Because of the fragmentary nature of the text, this occurrence provides little aid in understanding the meaning of the Hebrew term.

Semantic Conclusions

The examination of the six uses of *עֶצֶב* above suggests that its semantic range includes both “(painful) toil” and perhaps “hurt, pain.” This second sense is suggested by the occurrence of *עֶצֶב* with *דְּבַר*, in the phrase “a hurtful word,” and it is possible that the same sense is used in Gen 3:16. The sense “toil” occurs more frequently in the biblical texts, but given the limited data, it is difficult to determine whether that sense was in fact the more common or primary meaning of the term.

¹¹⁸ See further discussion of this clause and verse below.

¹¹⁹ James H. Charlesworth and H. W. L. Rietz, eds., *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek Texts with English Translations*, vol. 4A, *Pseudepigraphic and Non-Masoretic Psalms and Prayers* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 69; Martínez and Tigchelaar, 1025: “[...] in all [their] sorrow[s ...].”

עֲצָרָה

Morphology

The noun עֲצָרָה occurs five times in the Hebrew Bible and twice in post-biblical Hebrew. The noun is feminine and can be singular or plural.

Syntactic Function

עֲצָרָה functions as the object of a preposition and as the subject or object of various verbs. It occurs once as the construct noun in a construct phrase. The noun עֲצָרָה is definite in three of its five occurrences, with definiteness indicated by a pronoun suffix.

Associative Field

Contexts of Use

The term עֲצָרָה occurs only in poetic texts, including once in Job, twice in the Psalms, and twice in Proverbs.

Syntagmatic Relations

עֲצָרָה functions as the subject of the verb רבה, “to multiply” (Ps 16:4) and as the object of the verbs יגר “fear” (Job 9:28), חבש “bind up” (Ps 147:3), and נתן “give, cause” (Prov 10:10). In Prov 15:13, עֲצָרָה, in construct with לב, is the object of the preposition כּ, which modifies a verbless clause: וּבְעֲצָרֹת־לֵב רִיחַ נִכְאָה “And in עֲצָרֹת of heart a spirit is stricken.” עֲצָרֹת occurs three times in the plural. Once, the plural is in construct with כָּל: יִגְרֵתִי כָּל-עֲצָרֹתַי “I fear all my עֲצָרוֹת” (Job 9:28).

In the three cases where the noun is definite, it takes a pronoun suffix referring to a person (Job, Job 9:28) or people (לְשִׁבּוּרֵי לֵב, “those broken in heart,” Ps 147:3); in Ps 16:4 it is unclear exactly who the 3mp suffix refers to, but mostly likely people are in view.¹²⁰ In these three occurrences with pronoun suffixes, the noun is also plural.

Elsewhere עֲצָבָהּ is associated specifically with the heart, in the construct phrase עֲצָבַת־לֵב (Prov 15:13). In Prov 10:10, it is unclear who is experiencing עֲצָבָהּ, but again it is likely that another person is in view: קֹרֵץ עֵינָיו יִתֵּן עֲצָבָהּ “The one who winks the eye will give/cause עֲצָבָהּ.”

In Ps 147:3, the plural עֲצָבוֹת appears as the object of מְחַבֵּשׁ, a piel participle from חָבַשׁ “bind up,” which has God as its implied subject. The use of עֲצָבָהּ as the object of this verb, which in the qal can be used of binding up brokenness or broken people (שָׁכַר, Isa 30:26; נִשְׁבַּרְתָּ, Ezek 34:4; נִשְׁבַּרְי־לֵב, Isa 61:1; broken [שָׁבַר] arm, Ezek 30:21), would suggest that עֲצָבָהּ here has a sense such as “brokenness” or “wound.”

¹²⁰ The Hebrew in this text is difficult: יִרְבּוּ עֲצָבוֹתָם אֶתֵּר מְהֵרָה “They multiply their עֲצָבוֹת; they acquire [or hasten to] another one.” The adjective אֶתֵּר probably refers to “another god” (Timothy E. Saleska, *Psalms 1–50* [Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2020], 312; Delitzsch, *Psalms*, 1:223; cf. Isa 42:8). The verb מְהֵרָה could be from מָהַר I, “hasten,” as LXX seems to assume, but this seems unlikely since this sense is only found in the piel, whereas מְהֵרָה in Ps 16:4 is qal. Alternatively, מְהֵרָה may be from the denominative verb מָהַר III, “acquire by paying purchase-price” (BDB, s.v. “מָהַר III”; “acquire as one’s wife, HALOT, s.v. “מָהַר II”; or simply “acquire,” DCH, s.v. “מָהַר II”), which occurs elsewhere only in Exod 22:15. BHS proposes emending the difficult אֶתֵּר מְהֵרָה to אֶתֵּר יִרְאוּ “they fear others” or אֶתֵּר עָוִל “they make evil their way” or אֶתֵּר הַמִּירוּ “they change their way,” but there is no evidence to support emendation. Likely, אֶתֵּר מְהֵרָה should be understood as an asyndetic relative clause (Joüon §158a), lacking the relative pronoun אֲשֶׁר, that “describes the persons (referenced by the suffix ‘their’ on עֲצָבוֹתָם) whose sorrows would multiply” (Saleska, 311; see also Delitzsch, *Psalms*, 1:223). If that is the case, then the 3mp pronoun suffix with עֲצָבוֹת here would refer to idolaters, who have “acquired” another god: “their sorrows shall multiply—those who have acquired another god” (see Saleska, 311; on the disagreement between the 3mp verb יִרְבּוּ and 3fp עֲצָבוֹת, see GKC §145p). For further discussion of this difficult text, see Saleska, 311–312; Delitzsch, *Psalms*, 1:223–24.

Parallel Terms

In Prov 15:13, *בְּעֵצְבַת-לֵב* is parallel with *לֵב שְׂמֵחַ* “a joyful heart,” setting up a contrast between *עֵצְבַת* and *שְׂמֵחַ*: “a joyful heart makes glad the face, but in/by pain of heart the spirit is stricken.” Elsewhere, *עֵצְבַת* is parallel with *לֵב לִשְׁבוּרֵי לֵב* (Ps 147:3):

הַרְפָּא לִשְׁבוּרֵי לֵב “The one who heals those broken in heart,
וְאָמַחַזְשׁ לְעֵצְבוֹתָם and who binds up their *עֵצְבוֹת*.”

Here, the second line probably serves as a more narrow or specific restatement of the first; healing those broken in heart involves binding up their (figurative) “wounds” or “pains.”

Post-Biblical Hebrew

עֵצְבַת is used in Ben Sira 36:25 as the object of the verb *נָתַן*:

לֵב עֵקוּב יִתֵּן עֵצְבַת “A deceitful heart gives pain,
וְאִישׁ וְתִיק יִשִּׁיבְנָהּ בּוֹ and an experienced man causes it to come back to him.”

This expression is reminiscent of Prov 10:10, where *עֵצְבַת* also appears as the object of *נָתַן*; there, it is a person who “winks the eye” that causes/gives pain, while in Sir 36:25 it is a deceitful heart. In both contexts, the noun *עֵצְבַת* seems to have a similar sense. *עֵצְבַת* also occurs in a reconstruction of 4QTobit^e 1.1:4: רַבָּה עֵמִי [וְעֵצְבַת...] “[...and there is] much [sorrow] with me.”¹²¹ The text is fragmentary, but it seems from the context that *עֵצְבַת* probably has a similar sense to its biblical usage.

¹²¹ Martínez and Tigchelaar, 297.

Semantic Conclusions

The noun עֲצָרָה has the senses “pain” and “wound.” This second sense occurs only once (Ps 147:3), where it is used figuratively of the pains of a brokenhearted person. In some contexts, the referent of עֲצָרָה seems to be psychological pain, as indicated by the association with לֵב and רוּחַ (Prov 15:13). Elsewhere, it is unclear whether עֲצָרָה refers to physical or psychological pain (Job 9:28; Ps 16:4), and it is possible that, in these unmarked uses, both types of pain are in view. In all of its occurrences, the noun has a negative sense.

עֲצָב

Morphology

The noun עֲצָב occurs three times in the Hebrew Bible. The noun is masculine and is always found in the singular.

Syntactic Function

עֲצָב is used as the object of a preposition twice and in a verbless clause once, where it is the genitive in a construct phrase. The noun is indefinite twice and definite in one occurrence, where it takes a pronominal suffix (Isa 14:3).

Associative Field

עֲצָב functions as the object of בְּ in 1 Chron 4:9, where the prepositional phrase בְּעֲצָב modifies the verb יָלַד, likely designating attendant circumstances: “I brought forth in/with עֲצָב.” עֲצָב is elsewhere something that one can be given rest from, occurring in Isa 14:3 as the object of מִן with the verb נָח (hiph): “בְּיוֹם הַנָּחִים יִהְיֶה לְךָ מֵעֲצָבָהּ:”

the day Yahweh gives rest to you from your עֲצָב.” In Ps 139:24, the construct phrase דְּרֵדְךָ עֲצָב appears in a verbless conditional clause that functions as a complement to the verb רָאָה “See if a way of עֲצָב is in me.”¹²² דְּרֵדְךָ עֲצָב is parallel here with דְּרֵדְךָ עוֹלָם “everlasting way.”¹²³

עֲצָב is used in poetry (Ps 139:24), prophetic prose (Isa 14:3), and narrative (1 Chron 4:9). The three contexts in which עֲצָב is used are quite different. The occurrence with יָלַד (1 Chron 4:9) suggests the reference here is to pain associated with giving birth, most naturally understood as the physical pain of labor. In Ps 139:24, while identifying the referent is not as straightforward, it seems likely that עֲצָב refers to emotional pain; the דְּרֵדְךָ עֲצָב, “way of pain/hurt/grief,” or “hurtful way,” is probably best understood as “aspects of character that lead to grief” or pain, whether that pain/grief “comes to the unfaithful, as in [Ps.] 16:4,” or “to God, as in Gen. 6:6.”¹²⁴ Another distinct referent is in view in Isa 14:3, which describes the condition of Israel in the exile. עֲצָב is here found alongside רָגַז “agitation, nervousness, turmoil” and הָעֲבֹדָה הַקָּשָׁה אֲשֶׁר עָבַדְתֶּם בָּהּ “the hard service which you were made to serve,” suggesting that the referent in this case may be some sort of difficult labor. The noun עֲצָב may specifically highlight the physically or

¹²² Some understand עֲצָב here as עֲצָב II, “idol,” a noun occurring elsewhere only in Isa 48:5, derived from a different root (עָצַב II “shape, fashion,” BDB, s.v. “עָצַב II”). The expression “way of an idol” is then understood as referring to an idolatrous way, or idolatrous actions (see NET; L. C. Allen, *Psalms 101–150, Revised* [Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2002], 253; *HALOT*, s.v. “עָצַב I”; Goldingay, *Psalms*, 3:639). The LXX (ἀνομίας), as well as the Syriac and Targum, similarly seems to read עֲצָב II here. However, as Delitzsch suggests, “an inclination towards, or even apostasy to, heathenism cannot be an unknown sin” and thus עֲצָב I is probably preferable in this context where the psalmist is asking Yahweh to search him and his heart (Delitzsch, *Psalms*, 3:354).

¹²³ The psalmist asks God to רָאָה אִם-דְּרֵדְךָ עֲצָב בִּי וְיָנֹחַנִי בְּדֵרֶךְ עוֹלָם “see if there is any way of pain in me, and lead me in the everlasting way.”

¹²⁴ C. John Collins, “Psalms,” in *ESV Expository Commentary*, ed. Iain Duguid, James M. Hamilton, and Jay Sklar, vol. 5, *Psalms—Song of Solomon* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022), 661.

emotionally painful aspects of such labor.¹²⁵ Thus, the term עֶצֶב, which probably has the primary sense “pain,” can be applied to a variety of referents.¹²⁶

עֶצְבוֹן

Morphology

Another noun from the root עצב, עֶצְבוֹן, occurs three times in the Hebrew Bible.

The noun is masculine and is always found in the singular.

Syntactic Function

The noun עֶצְבוֹן is used once as the object of a verb and twice as the object of a preposition; in one occurrence, it is found in a construct phrase. עֶצְבוֹן is indefinite once and definite twice, with definiteness indicated by a pronoun suffix or by the definiteness of a word with which עֶצְבוֹן is in construct.

Associative Field

In Gen 3:17, עֶצְבוֹן functions as the object of בָּ, which modifies the verb אָכַל. The prepositional phrase בְּעֶצְבוֹן may designate the accompanying circumstances (“in/with”) or the instrument (“by means of”) of the verbal action: “In/with/by

¹²⁵ It is possible that עֶצֶב here could actually have a distinct sense, such as “painful toil,” rather than simply “pain,” but it is difficult to be certain given the limited data.

¹²⁶ The lexica differ in their treatment of this term. BDB lists the sense “pain” for all three occurrences (s.v., “עֶצֶב”). *DCH* proposes the senses “pain” and “hurt,” placing Isa 14:3 and Ps 139:24 under “hurt” and 1 Chron 4:9 under “pain,” with the note, “perh. more correctly *toil* of childbirth” (s.v. “עֶצֶב I”). *HALOT* lists two senses, “anxious toil, hardship” and “agony” (s.v. “עֶצֶב II”); interestingly, while one might expect 1 Chron 4:9 to fall under “agony,” only Ps 139:24 is placed under the second category (“the way of agony”), while 1 Chron 4:9 and Isa 14:3 are placed under the first.

means of עֲצָבוֹן you shall eat of [the ground] all the days of your life.” In Gen 5:29, the noun עֲצָבוֹן occurs as the object of the preposition מִן. Here, עֲצָבוֹן is part of a construct phrase: מֵעֲצָבוֹן יָדָינוּ “from the עֲצָבוֹן of our hands.” The prepositional phrase וּמֵעֲצָבוֹן is found alongside מִמְעֲשֵׂנוּ “from our works.” Both expressions modify the verb נָחַם (piel): וְנָחַמְנוּ מִמְעֲשֵׂנוּ וּמֵעֲצָבוֹן יָדָינוּ “This one will comfort us from our works and from the עֲצָבוֹן of our hands.” The noun עֲצָבוֹן also functions as the object of the verb רָבָה (hiph) in Gen 3:16; here, it is one of two objects, both taking 2fs pronoun suffixes: עֲצָבוֹנְךָ וְהָרְגָנְךָ “your עֲצָבוֹן and your pregnancy.”

While in Gen 3:16 and 3:17, עֲצָבוֹן affects a person, in Gen 5:29 it is more specifically designated as “עֲצָבוֹן of our hands.” This, along with the parallel term מְעֵשָׂה, suggests that עֲצָבוֹן is associated here with work or labor, with the sense perhaps being “toil” or “painful toil.” This sense is likely also in view in Gen 3:17, where the context is similar to 5:29 and the following verses make clear that humanity must engage in tiresome and difficult work in order to eat: “thorns and thistles [the ground] will cause to grow for you” (3:18); “by the sweat of your face you shall eat [אָכַל] bread” (3:19). “Toil” may also be the sense in Gen 3:16, though its use alongside הָרִוּן (“pregnancy” or “conception”) suggests it here refers to a different type of toil; alternatively, it is possible that עֲצָבוֹן has a different sense in Gen 3:16, such as “pain.”¹²⁷

¹²⁷ See further discussion of this term and passage below.

Morphology

The noun מַעֲצָבָה occurs only once in the Hebrew Bible. The noun is feminine, singular, and indefinite in its one occurrence.

Syntactic Function and Associative Field

In its lone occurrence, מַעֲצָבָה functions as the object of the preposition לְ with the verb שָׁכַב (Isa 50:11). The preposition here may designate a condition/situation (“in [a state of]”),¹²⁸ location (“in [a place of]”),¹²⁹ or cause (“on account of, because of”).¹³⁰ One of the first two possibilities seems most likely, since the context appears to describe a judgment coming upon those who fail to trust in God. The antecedent of the verb’s 2mp subject is “all you who kindle a fire,”¹³¹ referring to those among the people of Israel who walk by their own light rather than trusting in the Lord: מִיְדֵי הַיְתָה־נְאֻת לְכֶם לְמַעֲצָבָה תִּשְׁכְּבוּן
 “This was for you from my hand: you will lie down לְמַעֲצָבָה.”

Since the noun occurs only once, it is somewhat difficult to determine its precise meaning. Given that the context describes the judgment of those who fail to fear the Lord, מַעֲצָבָה clearly has a negative sense. If guidance to its meaning is to come from the related nouns, it seems that מַעֲצָבָה could have the sense “toil” or “pain.” Since it likely

¹²⁸ BDB, s.v. “לְ.”

¹²⁹ BDB, s.v. “מַעֲצָבָה”; *HALOT*, s.v. “שָׁכַב.”

¹³⁰ *DCH*, s.v. “שָׁכַב I.”

¹³¹ The verse as a whole reads: “Behold, all of you who kindle a fire, who gird yourselves with flaming arrows: walk by the light of your fire and by the flaming arrows you have kindled. This was for you from my hand: you will lie down in מַעֲצָבָה.”

describes a place or condition associated with lying down, the sense “toil” is probably not appropriate in this context. Goldingay and Payne suggest that while the *n* preformative on the root “could suggest location...it could equally denote abstraction (thus simply ‘pain’) or instrument (thus perhaps ‘torment’).”¹³² While an instrumental sense or locative sense is possible, it seems that the most straightforward sense would be simply “pain,” with the preposition *l* designating a situation or condition (“in [a state of] pain”).

עֶצֶב/עֶצְבָּ

Morphology

The noun עֶצֶב/עֶצְבָּ occurs only once in the Hebrew Bible.¹³³ In its one usage, the noun is masculine, plural, and definite, with a 2mp pronominal suffix (Isa 58:3).

Syntactic Function and Associative Field

עֶצֶב/עֶצְבָּ occurs in a construct phrase with *kl* as the object of the verb *ngsh*, “to oppress”: “Behold, in the day of your fast you

¹³² John Goldingay and David Payne, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Isaiah 40–55* (London: T&T Clark, 2006), 2:218. See Joüon §88Ld; *IBHS* §5.6b. BDB suggests that *shkb* here has the sense “to lie down in death” and prefers the locative sense “place of pain” over simply “pain,” apparently seeing in *me'ezbe* a reference to the place of the dead (BDB, s.v. “*me'ezbe*”). However, taking Joos’ rule of maximum redundancy into account, which says that a lexicographer should define a hapax legomenon “in such fashion as to make it contribute least to the total message derivable from the passage where it is at home,” this proposal should probably be rejected (Martin Joos, “Semantic Axiom Number One,” *Language* 48, no. 2 [1972]: 257 [emphasis original]). While “place of pain” (BDB, s.v. “*me'ezbe*”; see also *DCH*, s.v. “*me'ezbe*,” “[place of] pain”; *HALOT*, s.v. “*me'ezbe*,” “place of torment”) is not impossible, the “least meaning”—or the lexically minimal sense—in this context is probably simply “pain” or perhaps “torment.” The *l* preposition may designate location, “lay down in [a place of] pain,” but to see here a technical term referring to Gehenna (BDB, s.v. “*shkb*”; *DCH*, s.v. “*shkb*”) seems to be reading too much into the expression. See further discussion in Goldingay and Payne, 2:218–19.

¹³³ As the term only occurs in a plural construct form, עֶצְבֵיכֶם, the singular absolute must be reconstructed; both עֶצֶב or עֶצְבָּ are possible reconstructions (*HALOT*, s.v. “*me'ezbe* or *ezbe*”).

seek [your own] pleasure and you oppress all your עֹצְבִים” (Isa 58:3b). Since עֹצַב is a hapax legomenon, it is difficult to define with certainty. While the sense is likely connected to that of the other nouns from the same root, the occurrence as the object of the verb גִּישׁ suggests that עֹצַב describes a person, a “toiler”¹³⁴ or “laborer,”¹³⁵ rather than an abstract concept like “pain” or “toil.” The sense “toiler” or “laborer” fits well in the context. The subject of the 2mp verb “you oppress,” as well as the referent of the 2mp pronoun suffix in the expression עֹצְבֵיכֶם, is the Israelites. In 58:3b, God is responding to the hypothetical questions of the Israelites (“Why have we fasted, and you have not seen? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you do not know?” 58:3a), giving the reasons why he has paid no attention to their fasting. Parallel to the phrase וְכָל-עֹצְבֵיכֶם תִּנְגְּשׁוּ “and all your laborers you oppress” is תִּמְצְאוּ-חֵפֶז “you seek pleasure”; both actions occur בְּיוֹם צְמִמְכֶם “in the day of your fast.” God pays no attention to their fasting because in the day of their fast the Israelites oppress their workers (עֹצְבֵיכֶם) and pursue their own pleasure, demonstrating only a selfish concern for themselves.

¹³⁴ BDB, s.v. “עֹצַב.”

¹³⁵ DCH, s.v. “עֹצַב.”

מרץ

מרץ

Morphology

Hebrew

The verb מרץ occurs four times in the OT, three times in the niph'al and once in the hiph'il. It also occurs twice in the DSS. There are no related terms found in the OT, though the noun מָרָץ occurs in the DSS.¹³⁶

Other Semitic Languages

The Hebrew מרץ has cognates in a number of other semitic languages, including Ugaritic, *mrš* “to be sick, sickness,”¹³⁷ as well as Akkadian, *marāṣu* “to fall ill, have a disease, (in the stative) to be diseased,” “to be concerned, to be cause for annoyance, to become troublesome, difficult, (in the stative) to be difficult, in difficulty

¹³⁶ 1QH^a 11:11.

¹³⁷ HALOT, s.v. “מרץ.”

troublesome,”¹³⁸ Amorite *MRS* “to be sick, to be angry,”¹³⁹ Aramaic, מרע “maladie,”¹⁴⁰ Syriac, “to be sick,” and Arabic, *mrd* “to be sick.”¹⁴¹

Syntax

Niphal

The verb מרץ occurs in the niphal three times, with the intransitive syntax:

 נמרץ “b was painful/sickening.”

Twice, the niphal participle appears as an attributive participle.

Hiphil

The verb מרץ occurs once in the hiphil, where it is causative and has the syntax:

<a> המרץ “b causes pain to/sickens a.”

¹³⁸ *CAD*, 10.1:269. The article lists 8 different senses: “1. to fall ill, have a disease, (in the stative) to be diseased, 2. to be concerned, to be cause for annoyance, to become troublesome, difficult, (in the stative) to be difficult, in difficulty, troublesome, 3. (with *eli*, *ina muḥḥi*, *ana*, or dative) to become displeasing, troublesome, 4. (with *libbu* as subject) to become angry, displeased, 5. *murrusu* to cause difficulty, annoyance, 6. *sumrusu* to cause trouble, difficulty, to make (someone) worry, to bring illness (upon someone), (with *eli*) to make (someone or something) displeasing, 7. III/2 to be troubled, annoyed (passive to mng. 6), 8. III/2 to concern oneself, to take trouble.” *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch* lists the senses “krank, beschwerlich sein, werden” (Wolfram von Soden, *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch* [Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1965], 2:609).

¹³⁹ Ges¹⁸, s.v. “מרץ”; Ignace J. Gelb, *Computer-aided Analysis of Amorite* (Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1980), 25.

¹⁴⁰ Jean, 168.

¹⁴¹ *HALOT*, s.v. “מרץ.”

Associative Field

Contexts of Use

The verb מרץ appears three times in poetic contexts, including twice in Job and once in prophetic literature. It also is used once in narrative speech.

Syntagmatic Relations

With the hiphil, both the agent (b-element) and the one experiencing pain/sickness (a-element) are specified, while in the niphil, only the agent or cause is specified. In the niphil, the a-element must be implied from the context. The b-element that is painful can be אִמְרֵי־יֶשָׁר “upright words” (Job 6:25), הִבָּל “destruction” (Mic 2:10), or קִלְלָה “curse” (1 Kgs 2:8). While the a-element is not specified in the syntax of the niphil, it is often clear from the context. In Job 6:25, מִה־נִּמְרָצוּ אִמְרֵי־יֶשָׁר וּמִה־יִּוִּכִיחַ הוֹכַחַת מִכֶּם, “How painful are upright words! And what does reproof from you reprove?” it is evident that the pain is being caused to Job. In Mic 2:10, where the niphil participle is used attributively with the b-element הִבָּל, the implied a-element is the land or perhaps especially the people within it. Here, in the midst of denouncing those committing injustice and oppression in Israel, Micah instructs the people to “arise and go, for this is not a resting place, because of uncleanness that destroys and נִמְרָץ destruction” (קוּמוּ וּלְכוּ כִּי לֹא־זֹאת הַמְנוּחָה בְּעֵבֹר טְמֵאָה) (תְּחַבֵּל וְתִבָּל נִמְרָץ). The uncleanness of oppressive, unjust people in Israel has destroyed the land, with destruction that is painful to the land/people. A similar usage of the attributive participle is found with the adverbial accusative noun קִלְלָה in 1 Kgs 2:8: וְהוּא קִלְלָנִי קִלְלָה: “And he cursed me with a נִמְרָצַת curse in the day I went to מַחְגְּגִים”

Mahanaim.” David is here speaking of Shimei, who cursed him with a curse that was “painful” or “grievous.”

In the lone hiphil occurrence, where there is a more active causal agent, the b-element is the interrogative pronoun *מה*, in the question *אוּ מַה-יִמְרִיצֶךָ כִּי תַעֲנֶנָּה* “or what יִמְרִיצֶנּוּ you that you answer?” (Job 16:3). Here, the a-element—the person being caused pain/sickness—is the 2ms pronoun suffix, referring to Job’s friend(s).¹⁴² The question—“what causes you pain/sickens you that you answer?”—like the question in the parallel line before it (*הֲגַחַץ לְדַבְרֵי-רִיחַ* “is there an end to windy words?”)—is probably rhetorical, and the idea expressed with *מֵרַץ* likely figurative. Job is not arguing that something is actually causing Eliphaz pain/sickness but insinuating with this image that there must be something provoking Eliphaz to cause him to continue speaking such empty words.¹⁴³

Post-Biblical Hebrew

The verb *מֵרַץ* occurs twice in post-biblical Hebrew, each time in the niphal with the noun *חֶבֶל* “birth/labor pang” in the phrase *חֶבֶל נִמְרָץ* (1QH^a 11:8, 12). In 11:8, *נִמְרָץ* could be an attributive participle (“painful/grievous pang”)¹⁴⁴ or a niphal perfect verb taking *חֶבֶל* as its subject (“a pang was painful upon the mouth of her womb”).¹⁴⁵ In 11:12,

¹⁴² In Job 16:2, 4, the pronouns Job employs are second-person plural, apparently referring to Job’s three friends. In 16:3, the second-person pronoun is singular, perhaps indicating that Job is here specifically addressing Eliphaz, who was the speaker in Job 15.

¹⁴³ Job seems to be here expressing his frustration with Eliphaz’s speech that immediately precedes, which was meant to comfort Job but “is primarily an accusation; it wounds instead of soothing” (Delitzsch, *Job*, 1:278).

¹⁴⁴ Or “intensive tribulation” (Charlesworth et al., *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, 5A:125); “painful labor” (Schuller and Newsom, 37).

¹⁴⁵ See Martínez and Tigchelaar, “and a pang racks [*נִמְרָץ*] the mouth of her womb” (165).

מרץ is probably an attributive participle, coming after the noun חָבַל, which is the object of the preposition ל.¹⁴⁶ The noun מָרָץ, “agony,” also appears in this same passage in a construct phrase with חבלי מרץ: “labor pains of agony.”¹⁴⁷

Semantic Conclusions

The verb מרץ seems to have a broad sense, “to be sickening, painful” in the niph'al and “to sicken, to cause pain to” in the hiph'il. The participle, in its attributive usages, almost seems to be used idiomatically, acting as an intensifying adjective. That is, rather than actually communicating that “destruction” or a “curse” were “painful/sickening,” the idea communicated in these contexts could be something like “grievous” or “terrible.” Since there are only four occurrences of מרץ in biblical materials, three of which are in poetic texts, it is difficult to be certain of its exact sense, but it certainly seems to convey something negative in all uses.

Relations Between the Terms

In studying terms in the semantic field of pain, it is valuable not only to examine each term individually but also to more closely consider these terms alongside one another to discern their “shared, distinctive, and supplementary features.”¹⁴⁸ A

¹⁴⁶ The expression is part of a verbless clause that reads: והריט אפעה לחבל נמרץ “And she who is pregnant with a serpent is with a racking pang” (Martínez and Tigchelaar, 165).

¹⁴⁷ *DCH*, s.v. “מָרָץ.” 1QH^a 11:10–11 reads במולדיהם מרץ בחבלי וחרבלי מרץ “In the woman expectant with him rush all the contractions and the racking pain [וחרבלי מרץ] at their birth” (Martínez and Tigchelaar, 165). Charlesworth et al., *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, 5A:125, translate, “all the opening of the womb hastened, and intensive tribulations [וחרבלי מרץ] (occurred) when they were born.”

¹⁴⁸ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), vi.

comparison of the terms studied above enables us to see both the points of overlap and the differences between them and thus sharpens our understanding of their meanings. A few comments can be made regarding the relations between these terms.

Verbs

As noted above, the verb כָּאב seems to have a fairly broad sense, “to be in pain,” which can be applied in many different contexts in reference to various types of pain. כָּאב thus appears to be a much more general term than some of the alternatives, such as עֲצַב. In contrast to כָּאב, which has the broad sense “to be in pain” (qal) or “to cause pain” (hiphil), עֲצַב in almost all occurrences has a more narrow, emotional sense, “to feel pain/sorrow, be grieved” (niph'al, hithpa'el) or “to cause pain/grief” (qal, piel, hiphil). It is possible, as the occurrence in Eccl 10:9 suggests, that עֲצַב is polysemous and can describe both physical and emotional pain, like כָּאב; however, at least in the materials available to us it seems that the pain involved with עֲצַב is more frequently emotional pain, or “grief.” Both verbs describe pain, but עֲצַב appears to have a more narrow or restricted sense than כָּאב, indicating that perhaps עֲצַב could be considered a hyponym of כָּאב.¹⁴⁹ Even when כָּאב is used in reference to emotional pain, that does not indicate its sense is “to grieve” rather than “to be in pain” more generally, whereas the sense of עֲצַב seems to specifically have in view “grief,” often with a nuance of anger. While there may be contexts where כָּאב could be used in place of עֲצַב with little difference in meaning, עֲצַב could probably only

¹⁴⁹ Silva defines hyponymy as “the relationship holding between the senses of a general and a specific term” (Silva, *Biblical Words*, 219). For example, “rose” and “tulip” are both hyponyms of “flower.” In contrast to synonyms, which are “mutually interchangeable in some contexts,” a “superordinate and its hyponym(s)” are generally not mutually interchangeable (Silva, *Biblical Words*, 219). While it is possible that “flower” could take the place of “rose” in a sentence, the reverse is not necessarily true.

replace **כאב** in cases where emotional pain is in view. Even then, something would probably be lost by substituting **כאב** for **עצב**, since **כאב** seems to have a more general nuance than **עצב**.¹⁵⁰

Like **כאב**, the verb **מרץ** seems to be a fairly general term, having the sense “to be painful, sickening” (niphil) or “to cause pain, sicken” (hiphil). Unlike **כאב**, however, **מרץ** is frequently used with non-human actors causing pain, such as words (Job 6:25), a curse (1 Kgs 2:8), or destruction (Mic 2:10). This seems to suggest its meaning may be a bit more abstract than **כאב**. Of course, since the verb **מרץ** only occurs four times in the OT, it is difficult to have certainty about its range of meaning and relation to the other terms in this field.

Nouns

כָּאֵב and **מְכָאוֹב** seem to have significant semantic overlap, to the point where they could perhaps be considered essentially synonymous. The nouns from the root **עצב** have some semantic similarities with one another but also some distinctions: the noun **עֲצָבָה** can have the sense “pain” or “wound,” usually used in reference to emotional pain; **עֲצָב** seems to have the senses “pain” and perhaps “painful toil” (Isa 14:3); **עֲצָבָה** can mean “toil/painful toil” or “hurt”; **עֲצָבוֹן** has the sense “toil/painful toil” and **מֵעֲצָבָה** “pain.” Thus, while they overlap in the fact that most of them have some nuance of pain, there are nevertheless differences in meaning between these various nouns. Because some of the nouns from the

¹⁵⁰ The verbs are never used in parallel, but both verbs appear in Gen 34, with very different referents: **עצב** (hithpaal) is used of the sons of Jacob being grieved (**יָתֵעֲצְבוּ**) and angry upon hearing of their sister’s defilement by Shechem (34:7), while **כאב** is used of the physical pain experienced by the men of the land (**כָּאֵבִים**) following their circumcision (34:25).

root עִצַּב occur so infrequently, it is somewhat difficult to identify their precise sense and how it relates to the senses of other terms from the root and other words in the semantic field. Nevertheless, a few comments can be made.

The nouns מְכָאוֹב and כָּאֵב seem to have some similarity semantically with certain nouns from the root עִצַּב. In some cases, there appears to be significant overlap in sense. For example, עִצְבָּת in Prov 15:13, “by עִצְבָּת of heart the spirit is stricken,” seems to have a very similar sense to כָּאֵב in Isa 65:14, “you yourselves will cry out from כָּאֵב of heart.” In some contexts, עִצְבָּת seems to have a fairly broad sense, similar to כָּאֵב or מְכָאוֹב, while elsewhere the sense seems to be narrower than these other terms, designating specifically emotional pain. Thus, it is probably best to say these nouns may be nearly synonymous in some, but not all, contexts. It seems better elsewhere to describe עִצְבָּת as a hyponym of the more general terms כָּאֵב and מְכָאוֹב.

עִצָּב has a slightly different nuance than עִצְבָּת, denoting not just “pain” but “painful toil” in many occurrences. עִצָּב, along with עִצְבוֹן “painful toil,” could thus also perhaps be considered hyponyms of מְכָאוֹב and כָּאֵב, describing a specific type or cause of pain. While עִצָּב and עִצְבוֹן probably could not replace מְכָאוֹב and כָּאֵב in any context, it is possible that מְכָאוֹב and כָּאֵב could be used in some contexts in place of עִצָּב or עִצְבוֹן, though the specific nuance of “work/toil” would be lost with the use of one of these more general terms. In other words, while there is some relation semantically, they are not mutually interchangeable.

The use of the term עִצָּב in Prov 15:1, where it likely has the sense “hurt,” seems to overlap semantically with some uses of the verb מָרַץ. In Prov 15:1, a “word” is described as a “word of hurt/pain” or “hurtful word”: וּדְבַר-עִצָּב יַעֲלֶה-אָף: “A word of עִצָּב

stirs up anger.” A similar idea is found in Job 6:25, where “words,” here designated with the noun אָמַר rather than דְּבָר, are described as “painful” with the verb מֵרֵץ: מֵה־נְמָרְצוּ אָמְרֵי־י: מֵרֵץ: “How the words of uprightness are painful [נְמָרְצוּ]!”¹⁵¹

¹⁵¹ See also 1 Kgs 2:8: “he cursed me with a נְמָרְצַת curse,” i.e., a curse that was hurtful or caused pain.

Chapter 3

Pangs: חיל, חבל, ציר

The terms covered in this chapter include those from the root חיל, as well as חבל, חבל, and ציר. Unlike the words discussed in the previous chapter, most of which denote “pain” generally, the terms examined here all can have senses related to a specific type of pain, namely, the pain or pangs of childbirth.

חיל

The root חיל occurs 56 times in the Hebrew Bible, 45x as a verb and 11x in nominal forms: חיל (6x), חל־חלה (4x), and חילה (1x).

חיל (*Verb*)

Morphology

Hebrew

A major question that must be taken into consideration at the start is whether חיל (to be in labor, tremble, etc.) and חול (to whirl, turn upon, dance) should be understood as separate roots or the same root. BDB takes these as a single root,¹⁵² while *HALOT* reads two distinct roots.¹⁵³ Because the Hebrew ח (ח) has two possible antecedents in Semitic languages (ח and ח), a clear distinction in the Semitic cognates between ח and ח might

¹⁵² See also Scharbert, *Schmerz*, 21–26.

¹⁵³ See also Ges¹⁸, s.v. “חיל and חול²; “חול¹.”

provide evidence for reading these as two separate roots. Such a distinction does in fact seem to exist. For the verb חוּל, *HALOT* suggests cognates with the letter *ḥ*: Arabic *ḥwl* “to turn,” *ḥaula* “around,” and Old South Arabian *ḥwl* “surrounding.”¹⁵⁴ For the verb חִיל, *HALOT* lists cognates containing the letter *ḥ*: Ugaritic *ḥl* and Akkadian *ḥi’ālu*.¹⁵⁵ Unfortunately, it is not clear how much confidence can be placed in these cognates, and it is ultimately outside the scope of this paper to conduct an in-depth comparative study. While it is possible that synchronically there may have been essentially no awareness of a distinction between these roots, it seems plausible, based on the cognate data, that diachronically they should be pulled apart. Thus, for the purposes of this study, these will be treated as separate roots, on the basis of the fact that there may be a distinction between the cognates (חִיל related to roots using *ḥ* and חוּל related to roots using *ḥ*).

The verb חִיל probably occurs 45 times in the OT, in the qal (29x), polel (6x), polal (5x), hiphil (2x), hophal (1x), hithpolel (1x), and hithpalpel (1x). The determination of the number of occurrences is complicated by the existence of multiple Hebrew verbs with similar root letters, including חִיל, חוּל, חָלַל, חָלָה, and יָחַל, as well as by disagreement among lexica over the existence and meaning of possible homonyms.¹⁵⁶ As Bauman notes, the

¹⁵⁴ *HALOT*, s.v. “חוּל.” Also noted is the occurrence of this term in Middle Hebrew and Jewish Aramaic of the Galilean tradition meaning “to dance, to turn around, to hit.”

¹⁵⁵ *HALOT*, s.v. “חִיל I.”

¹⁵⁶ As noted above, for the phonetically similar חִיל and חוּל, BDB recognizes only one verb, חִיל/חוּל, “whirl, dance, writhe,” as well as a homonym, חִיל/חוּל II (qal, “be firm, strong,” occurring only in Ps 10:5; Job 20:21). More modern lexica, on the other hand, identify חִיל and חוּל as distinct roots. For the root חִיל, *DCH* lists three homonymous verbs: חִיל I, occurring in the qal (“be in pain, be in labour, travail”), hiphil (“cause to tremble, cause writhing”), hophal (“be brought to birth”), polel (“bring into labour, bring to birth”), polal (“be brought to birth, be brought to trembling”), hithpolel (“writhe in fear”), and hithpalpel (“writhe in fear”); חִיל II, occurring in the qal (“wait”), polel (“wait”), and hithpolel (“wait longingly”); and חִיל III, occurring in the qal (“endure”), only in Ps 10:5 and Job 20:21. For חוּל, *DCH* lists two homonyms: חוּל I, occurring in the qal (“whirl, dance”), polal (“dance”), and hithpolal (“whirl”); and a possible חוּל II (“be weak”), occurring only in the qal in Lam 4:6 and only if the text is emended. *HALOT* lists one verb from

root חיל “cannot always be easily distinguished from words derived from” these other roots.¹⁵⁷

There are a few cases where a verbal form that morphologically appears to be from חיל should probably be read as derived from a different root. In some instances, the confusion is between חיל and יהל.¹⁵⁸ Some have also suggested that the occurrences of וַיִּהָל in 1 Sam 31:3 and 1 Chron 10:3 should be understood not as forms of חיל but derived from הָלָה (“to be weak, sick, injured”).¹⁵⁹ Also debated is the form הָלוּ in Jer 5:3, which is accented as though from the root חיל; some propose repointing as הָלוּ, from הָלָה.¹⁶⁰

the root חיל, related etymologically to the Arabic *ḥwl* “to turn,” occurring in the qal (“go round, turn upon, dance”), pilpel (“dancing around”), and hithpolel (“whirl”), and two from the root חיל I, related etymologically to the Ug. *ḥl* and Akk. *ḥi’ālu*, occurring in the qal (“to be in labour, writhe, tremble”), polel (“to cause labour pains; to bring forth [through labor pains]”), polal (“to be brought forth; to be made to tremble”), hiphil (“to cause labor pains [this sense only occurring in DSS]; to cause to tremble”), hophal (“to be brought forth through labor pains”), hithpolel (“to writhe with fear”), and hithpalpel (“to be seized by fear”), and חיל II, occurring in the qal (“to endure”) one or two times.

¹⁵⁷ A. Bauman, “חיל,” *TDOT* 4:344.

¹⁵⁸ Gen 8:10; Judg 3:25; Job 45:15; Ps 37:7; Lam 3:26; Mic 1:12. One difficult passage is Lam 4:6, where the form וַיִּהָל is found, which could, morphologically, be a qal perfect 3cp form from either חיל or חיל (“dance, whirl,” *DCH*, s.v. “חיל I”; “go round, turn upon, dance,” *HALOT*, s.v. “חיל”). The Hebrew of the clause, וַיִּהָל בְּהָ יְדֵימ, is very difficult. The verse reads וַיִּהָל בְּהָ יְדֵימ וַיִּהָל בְּהָ יְדֵימ “and the iniquity of the daughter of my people has become greater than the sin of Sodom, who was overthrown in a moment, and hands וַיִּהָל in her.” *DCH* notes a proposed emendation of וַיִּהָל to וַיִּהָל (changing the accent from the first to the last syllable), a qal perfect 3cp of הָלָה, “to be weak, sick.” A number of other proposals—usually suggesting either emendations or the presence of a different, homonymous verb—have been made in an attempt make the line intelligible. While these cannot be explored here due to the limitations of this thesis, it seems plausible that וַיִּהָל is not derived from חיל, and this passage is thus not included in the occurrences of חיל examined in this paper. For further discussion, see R. B. Salters, *Lamentations: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, ICC (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 297–99.

¹⁵⁹ *HALOT* suggests reading the verb וַיִּהָל as either a niphal (וַיִּהָל) or hophal (וַיִּהָל) from the verb הָלָה (to be sick, weak, injured), with the LXX (ἐτραυματίσθη εἰς τὰ ὑποκόσθρια, “and he was wounded in the stomach”) and Vulgate (*et vulneratus est...*), as well as two copies of the Codex Legionensis (ϩ⁹³, ϩ⁹⁴, *et sauciatus est in congressione illa*) (*HALOT*, s.v. “חיל I”).

¹⁶⁰ See BDB, s.v. “חיל I”; *HALOT*, s.v. “חיל I.” Perhaps the occurrence here alongside נכה (הִכָּתָה אֹתָם וַיִּהָל) would lend support to this proposal. The verb וַיִּהָל occurs with נכה in a similar phrase in Prov 23:25: הִכָּתָה אֹתָם וַיִּהָל “They struck me, but I did not become sick/injured.” The larger clause in which the verb appears in Jer 5:3 is הִכָּתָה אֹתָם וַיִּהָל כִּי לֹא יָקָחוּ מוֹסָר “You struck them, but they did not take chastisement.” The LXX (οὐκ ἐπόνεσαν) is somewhat ambiguous. See Christl M. Maier, *Jeremiah 1–25*, IECOT (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2025), 133; William McKane, *A*

Because *הָיִל* or *הָלָה* would be fitting in the contexts of 1 Sam 31:3 // 1 Chron 10:3 and Jer 5:3, it is impossible to be certain whether these are forms of *הָיִל* or *הָלָה*; in this case, perhaps it would thus be best to accept the Masoretic accents and thus take these as forms of *הָיִל*. Ultimately, either way, the meaning of the text remains essentially the same.¹⁶¹

There are also instances where scholars have proposed reading *הָיִל* in place of a word found in the MT, but in most cases, the emendation to *הָיִל* is unnecessary.¹⁶²

Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986), 1:116; C. F. Keil, *The Prophecies of Jeremiah*, trans. David Patrick (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1889), 122; William Lee Holladay, *Jeremiah 1: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah Chapters 1–25* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 177.

¹⁶¹ Note also that, with either verb, in Jer 5:3 the referent is essentially the same: rebellious people who have apparently been unaffected by the Lord’s discipline. Whether they “felt no anguish” (*הָיִל*) or “did not become sick/hurt” (*הָלָה*), the idea is that they have been unaffected by God’s striking them; they have failed to change their behavior in response to God’s discipline.

¹⁶² In Ps 109:22 (*וְלִבִּי תִלְלֵנִי*), some propose reading *הוֹלִלֵנִי*, a polal perfect from *הָיִל* (“my heart was made to tremble”), in place of the MT *תִּלְלֵנִי*, a qal perfect of *תִּלְלַ* “to pierce,” a verb that seems to be otherwise unattested in the qal (“my heart was pierced”) (BHS; *HALOT*, s.v. “הָיִל I”; *DCH*, s.v. “הָלָה III”; some suggest the verb occurs in the qal in Ps 77:11[10], but the form *תִּלְלֵנִי* there is likely not from *תִּלְלַ* III but a piel infinitive construct of the verb *תִּלְלַ* II “to entreat” [see discussion in Collins, “Homonymous Verbs,” 537]). This proposal is perhaps supported by the LXX, ἡ καρδία μου τετάρακται ἐντός μου “my heart is troubled/has been stirred up within me.” Further support may come from the fact that the verb *הָיִל* occurs with the subject *לֵב* and preposition *בְּקַרְבִּי* in Ps 55:5[4]: *לֵבִי יִתְּיֵל בְּקַרְבִּי* “My heart writhes in anguish within me.” However, there, the verb occurs in the qal. The LXX translates Ps 55:5[4] with a different form of the verb found in the LXX of 109:22 (*ἐταράχθη*, from *ταράσσω*). Jerome appears to take *תִּלְלֵנִי* as a form of *תִּלְלַ* III “to be pierced” in Ps 109:22: *et cor meum vulneratum est intrinsecus* “And my heart is wounded within me” (he seems to read the verb *הָיִל* in Ps 55:5[4], where he translates *cor meum doluit in vitalibus meis* “my heart is troubled in my vitals”). Kaddary has proposed that the form *תִּלְלֵנִי* in Ps 109:22 is simply an alternate form of *הָיִל* (M. Z. Kaddary, “הָלָה = ‘Bore,’ ‘Pierce’?” *Vetus Testamentum* 13 [1963]: 489). Many translations take *תִּלְלֵנִי* as a form of *תִּלְלַ* (“pierced,” “wounded,” or “stricken,” ESV, NIV, NRSVue, KJV, NKJV, NASB, NJPS; see also Bratcher and Reyburn, 944; Amos Hakham, *The Bible: Psalms with the Jerusalem Commentary*, vol. 3, *Psalms 101–150* [Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 2003], 129), though some read it as a form of *הָיִל* (NET, Allen, 98, 107; Goldingay, *Psalms*, 3:275). Each of these readings—*תִּלְלֵנִי* “be pierced,” *הוֹלִלֵנִי* “be made to tremble,” or *תִּלְלֵנִי* “tremble,” from *הָיִל*—are plausible in the context, and it is difficult to discern which should be preferred.

In Ps 110:3, the conjectural reading, *הוֹלִלְךָ* (noted in *HALOT*, s.v. “הָיִל I”) or *הוֹלִלְךָ* (*BHS* apparatus), is probably unnecessary; the MT *הַיּוֹם חֵילְךָ*, in the phrase *בְּיּוֹם חֵילְךָ* “in the day of your strength,” is supported by the LXX (*ἐν ἡμέρᾳ τῆς δυνάμεώς σου*).

In Prov 26:10, it is probably preferable to read *מְחִלְלֵכֵל* in the expression *רַב מְחִלְלֵכֵל כֹּל* as a poel participle of *תִּלְלַ* “to pierce, wound” (“an archer [or master] wounds/pierces all”; see *BDB*, s.v. “תִּלְלַ I”) rather than a polel participle from *הָיִל* (see *BDB*, s.v. “הוֹלֵל,” which suggests the translation “a master produceth everything”). The text is difficult, but the former option would seem to fit the context better, where this line is probably stating something negative (i.e., an archer injuring people). See NET footnote for further discussion.

However, there seems to be some support for the conjectural reading in Jer 4:31, which suggests that the participle חוֹלָה, formally a qal fs participle from חָלָה, should be understood as derived from חִיל instead.¹⁶³ The parallel with כְּמִבְכִּירָה “like one bearing her first child” lends support to reading כְּחוֹלָה as a participle from חִיל (“like a woman in anguish”) rather than חָלָה (“like one who is sick”).¹⁶⁴ Ultimately, however, both options seem plausible, and the meaning of the passage does not change significantly with either reading. In Jer 4:19, the ketiv (אחולה, qal cohortative 1cs from חִיל, “I writhe in pain”) is, as the *BHS* apparatus and others have suggested, probably to be preferred over the qere (אוֹחִילָה, hiphil cohortative 1cs from יחל “I wait”).¹⁶⁵ Though there remains some debate regarding the roots, the evidence seems to support taking both Jer 4:31 and 4:19 as instances of חִיל; these passages have thus been included as occurrences of the verb חִיל in this study.

Other Semitic Languages

The root חִיל has cognates in a number of other languages. A cognate term occurs in Phoenician with the meaning “to have labor pains.”¹⁶⁶ The root *hālu* occurs in

¹⁶³ The expected feminine singular participle form of חִיל here would be חָלָה. The *BHS* apparatus notes that the MT חוֹלָה “= כְּחָלָה,” apparently suggesting that חוֹלָה could in fact be understood as a participle from חִיל.

¹⁶⁴ The Hebrew of the verse reads כִּי קוֹל כְּחוֹלָה שְׁמַעְתִּי צָרָה כְּמִבְכִּירָה קוֹל בַּת-צִיּוֹן תִּתְנַפֵּס תִּפְרֹשׁ פִּיָּיהָ אֹיִ-נָּא לִי כִי-עֲיָפָה נִפְשִׁי לְהִרְגִים “For I heard a voice like חוֹלָה, distress like one bearing her first child, the sound of the daughter of Zion gasping for breath, stretching out her hands, ‘Woe is me, for my soul is faint before murderers.’”

¹⁶⁵ The ketiv is supported by the LXX (τὴν κοιλίαν μου τὴν κοιλίαν μου ἀλγῶ), Vulgate (*ventrem meum, ventrem meum doleo*), Targum, and multiple other Hebrew manuscripts.

¹⁶⁶ *DISO*, 87.

Akkadian (Babylonian Neo-Assyrian) with the sense “to be in labor.”¹⁶⁷ In Ugaritic, the verb *hl* has the sense “to writhe (with birth pangs)” or “to skip, jump”; with the first sense, it occurs alongside *ld* (“give birth”).¹⁶⁸

Syntax

Qal

In the *qal*, the verb *חיל* generally has intransitive syntax and seems to have multiple possible senses:

חיל <a> “a writhed/trembled/was in anguish/pain (in labor).”

There are numerous places where the verb is modified by a preposition, including nine times where it occurs with the preposition *מן*, generally denoting the cause of the anguish or, in phrases with *מן* + *פנים*, the person or thing before whom one experiences anguish/trembling:

<c> *חיל* *מן/מלפני/מפני* <a> “a was in anguish because of c”
or “a trembled before c.”

Once, *חיל* is modified by the preposition *ב* designating location, in the phrase, *לבי יחיל* *בקרבי* “my heart trembles within me” (Ps 55:5[4]). In one context, *חיל* in the *qal* appears to perhaps take an adverbial accusative: *מה־ת־חילין* “With what are you in labor?”¹⁶⁹ A *qal*

¹⁶⁷ *CAD*, 6:55; von Soden, 342. The root *hālu* has multiple homonyms, one of which (*hālu* B) has the sense “to tremble, writhe,” apparently occurring in Middle Babylonian and after (*CAD*, 6:55).

¹⁶⁸ Gregorio del Olmo Lete and Joaquín Sanmartín, *A Dictionary of the Ugaritic Language in the Alphabetic Tradition: Third Revised Edition*, ed. and trans. W. G. E. Watson (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 1:384.

¹⁶⁹ The syntax apparently being *חיל* <a> “a is in anguish/labor [with] b.”

feminine singular participle appears once, functioning substantively, as the object of the preposition ך (Jer 4:31).¹⁷⁰

Polel

In the polel, the verb היל is transitive and has an active sense:

 היל <a> “a brought forth b.”

The object is not always specified (Job 39:1). In one passage, the verb in the polel seems to have a causative force, <a> היל <d> “d makes a bring forth,” in the clause, קול יהוה יְהַנְּהוּ יְהוָה הוֹלֵל אֶת־וֹתֵי; “the voice of Yahweh makes does bring forth” (Ps 29:9). A polel participle occurs once as an attributive, modifying the noun אָל (Deut 32:18).

Polal

The polal of היל is generally the passive of the polel, with the syntax:

היל “b was brought forth.”

In one usage, however, the polal seems to have a different sense: <a> היל “a was caused to writhe/tremble (?)” (Job 26:5).¹⁷¹ The verb frequently occurs with prepositional phrases using the prepositions לִפְנֵי or בְּ. The preposition בְּ can designate attending circumstances (בְּעֲוֹן חוֹלְלָתִי “in iniquity I was brought forth,” Ps 51:7[5]) or time (בְּאֵי־יָם “when there were no deeps I was brought forth,” Prov 8:24), while לִפְנֵי twice has a temporal force (לִפְנֵי גְבַעוֹת “before the hills [were made],” Job 15:7; Prov 8:25).

¹⁷⁰ As noted above, however, it is possible that הוֹלְלָה in Jer 4:31 should be understood as a participle from the verb היל. See above for discussion of this passage.

¹⁷¹ See below for further discussion of this difficult passage.

Hiphil

The hiphil of היל occurs only twice in the OT; both occurrences are in Ps 29:8, with the syntax:

<a> יְהִיל <d> “d causes a to tremble/writhes.”

The hiphil also occurs in the DSS and in Ben Sira.

Hophal

The hophal of היל appears once in the OT. It has a passive sense, similar to the polal, and occurs with a temporal prepositional phrase:

<e> יוּחַל בְּ “b was brought forth in e.”

This syntax appears in the clause הַיּוֹחַל אֶרֶץ בְּיוֹם אֶחָד “was a land brought forth in one day?” (Isa 66:8).

Hithpolel

היל occurs once in the OT in the hithpolel, as a predicate participle with the syntax:

הַתְּחַלֵּל <a> “a trembles/writhes in pain.”

In its one occurrence, the hithpolel is modified by a temporal adverbial phrase: כָּל-יְמֵי “All the days of the wicked he trembles/writhes in pain” (Job 15:20). It is possible that the hithpolel of היל also occurs in Jer 23:19 to describe a tempest (סַעַר)

מִתְחַוֵּל, “a tempest that writhes”),¹⁷² though the participle in this verse could alternatively be from the root חוּל (“a whirling tempest”).¹⁷³

Hithpalpel

Finally, the verb חִיל occurs once in the hithpalpel, where it has the syntax:

הַתְּחַלְּחַל <a> “a trembles/writhes in pain/is in great anguish.”

The sense in the hithpalpel seems to be fairly similar to that in the hithpolel.

Associative Field

Contexts of Use

Almost all of the 45 occurrences of the verb are found in the prophetic books (22x) and the writings (17x), with a strong concentration in Isaiah (11x) and the Psalms (10x). חִיל occurs only twice in the Pentateuch (Deut 2:25; 32:18) and four times in the historical books (1 Sam 31:3 // 1 Chron 10:3; 1 Chron 16:30; Esth 4:4).¹⁷⁴ In the biblical texts, חִיל is almost exclusively found in poetry, with four exceptions (Deut 2:25; 1 Sam 31:3 // 1 Chron 10:3; Esth 4:4).

Syntagmatic Relations

In the qal, hiphil, hithpolel, and hithpalpel, the a-element describes the person or thing that is experiencing the pain/writhing; in the polel, the a-element is the entity

¹⁷² HALOT, s.v. “חִיל I.”

¹⁷³ DCH, s.v. “חִיל I.”

¹⁷⁴ In two of the historical book occurrences (1 Sam 31:3 // 1 Chron 10:3), the verb may actually be from the root חָלָה. See discussion above.

bringing forth/giving birth (through labor pains). A number of different a-elements are found with the verb **היל**. In the qal, hiphil, hithpolel, and hithpalpel, these include a person¹⁷⁵ or people/nations,¹⁷⁶ the heart (Ps 55:5[4]; Isa 13:8), and elements of nature, such as the waters or the sea (Ps 77:17[16]; Isa 23:4), the hills (Hab 3:10), the wilderness (Ps 29:8 [2x], hiphil), or the earth (**אָרֶץ**), which may refer to either the land/ground itself or to the peoples of the earth.¹⁷⁷ The a-element in the polel—that is, the one who is “bringing forth (through labor pains)” —can be a person (Isa 51:2), an animal (Job 39:1; Ps 29:9), wind (Prov 25:23), or God (Deut 32:18; Ps 90:2). The expression “like a woman giving birth” (**כִּי־יֹלְדָה**) is found twice accompanying **היל** in the qal, suggesting that **היל** is associated with the process of childbirth (Isa 13:8; Mic 4:10).

In many contexts, the focus of the verb in the qal is on the pain or anguish experienced by a woman during childbirth. This is particularly the case in contexts where **היל** is found with the verb **ילד**. In such cases, the sense of the verb **היל** seems to be something like “to have labor pains, writhe in anguish in labor.” At times, the a-element, who is said to be experiencing labor pains, is specifically a female (**הָרָה** “a pregnant woman,” Isa 26:17;¹⁷⁸ **אִשָּׁה** “a woman,” 45:10¹⁷⁹). The sense, “to have labor pains, writhe

¹⁷⁵ 1 Sam 31:3 // 1 Chron 10:3 (Saul); Esth 4:4 (hithpalpel); Job 15:20 (hithpolel); Jer 4:19; Isa 26:17; 45:10. In some cases, the a-element is a female figure that personifies or represents Jerusalem or Israel (“she” = Zion, Isa 66:7, 8; “daughter of Zion,” Mic 4:10; Jer 4:31; “barren one,” Isa 54:1).

¹⁷⁶ Deut 2:25; Isa 23:5; 26:18; Jer 5:3, 22; Ezek 30:16 [2x]; Joel 2:6; Zech 9:5.

¹⁷⁷ 1 Chron 16:30; Ps 96:9; 97:4; 114:7; Jer 51:29.

¹⁷⁸ Heb. **כְּמוֹ הָרָה תִּקְרֵיב לְלֵדָת תִּחִיל תִּנְעַם בְּחִבְלֶיהָ בְּנִי הִנְנוּ מִפְּנֵיךָ יְהוָה**. “Like a pregnant woman who draws near to bringing forth, who **תִּחִיל** and cries out with her labor pains, so we will be because of your presence, Yahweh.”

¹⁷⁹ Isa 45:10 is one of the only times the qal of **היל** is syntactically transitive; while **מָה** may simply be an adverbial accusative (“with what are you in anguish/labor?”), it may be that **היל** is essentially functioning in a way similar to the transitive **ילד**, with which it is parallel (“what are you bringing forth?”): “Woe to him

in anguish in labor,” can also be applied metaphorically to describe a city/nation (Isa 26:18; 54:1; 66:7, 8) or the personified sea (Isa 23:4) being in labor, with the focus of the metaphor being on the birthing process.¹⁸⁰

In other contexts, the childbirth or “labor” aspect is seemingly absent, and חיל appears to primarily communicate the idea of anguish, pain, or trembling. This sense can be used of an individual (Jer 4:19, מַעֲיוֹ מֵעֵיוֹ אֲחֻלָּהּ “my bowels, my bowels, I writhe in pain!”; Ps 55:5[4] לִבִּי יִחַיֵּל בְּקִרְבִּי “my heart writhes in pain within me”), but it also occurs frequently in cases where the a-element is a people group or an element of nature, none of which could properly be said to experience labor pains.¹⁸¹ חיל is commonly used to describe a reaction to seeing or hearing of a disastrous situation¹⁸² or to beholding God or his works,¹⁸³ and in such contexts, the verb frequently seems to have the sense “to be in anguish” or “to tremble.” In most of these uses, the verb seems to have a negative sense—trembling or being in anguish due to fear—but elsewhere it may have a more positive sense, as in Ps 96:9: הַשְׁתַּחֲוּנוּ לַיהוָה בְּהַדְרַת־קֹדֶשׁ חִילוֹ מִפְּנֵי פֶל־הָאָרֶץ “Worship Yahweh

who says to a father, ‘What are you begetting?’ and to a woman, ‘[With] what are you in labor?’” (לְהוֹי אִמֶּר (לְאָב מִה־תּוֹלֵד וּלְאִשָּׁה מִה־תַּחֲלִין).

¹⁸⁰ In Isa 23:4, the speaker is “the sea” (יָם) or “the stronghold of the sea” (מַעֲזוֹ הַיָּם), perhaps referring to Tyre itself. The verse contains the lament of Tyre over the loss of its young men and women when Tyre is destroyed and laid waste: בְּרוּשֵׁי צִידוֹן כִּי־אָמַר יָם מַעֲזוֹ לֹא־מָר לֹא־תִלְתִּי וְלֹא־יִלְדֹתִי וְלֹא־גַעַלְתִּי בַחֹרִים רוּמְמַתִּי בְּתוֹלוֹת: “Be ashamed, Sidon, for the sea has spoken, the stronghold of the sea, saying, ‘I did not bring forth, and I did not bring up young men; I did not raise up young women/virgins.’”

¹⁸¹ As the preceding paragraph indicates, however, not all occurrences where the a-element is a nation or element of nature fit in this category, since at times the verb’s focus appears to be more on being in labor/bringing forth in its metaphorical application to the sea (Isa 23:4) or to a city (Isa 66:7).

¹⁸² Deut 2:25; Isa 23:5; Jer 4:19; Joel 2:6; Zech 9:5.

¹⁸³ 1 Chron 16:30; Ps 77:17[16]; 96:9; 97:4; 114:7; Jer 5:22; Hab 3:10.

in the splendor of holiness, הִילֵךְ from his presence all the earth!”¹⁸⁴ Here, the idea of “anguish” or “pain” seems to be almost entirely absent.

There are two possible explanations for these various occurrences. This may simply be a distinct *usage*—that is, the sense “to writhe in pain (in labor)” is being metaphorically applied to, for example, a nation’s reaction to distressing news (“they will tremble and writhe in [labor] pain because of you,” וַיִּרְגְּזוּ וַיִּזְעֻקוּ מִפְּנֵיךָ, Deut 2:25), so that the nation is pictured as acting like a woman experiencing labor pains. In other words, it is possible that biblical authors have combined הִילֵךְ in certain contexts with an unexpected a-element, such as the nations or the earth, because they found the experience of those responding to distressing situations or to God’s presence to be comparable to that of a woman having labor pains. The audience is thus invited, with this imagery, to picture the people or earth as writhing in anguish/pain like a woman in labor. In some cases, the metaphor may communicate anguish and pain or fear (e.g., Deut 2:25; Isa 23:5), while in others, the point of the metaphor may be to depict a nation as if it were giving birth (Isa 26:18).

Alternatively, it is possible that “to have labor pains/writhe in anguish (in labor)” and “to be in anguish,” as well as perhaps “to tremble,” are distinct *senses*, perhaps related in origin but now distinct in usage.¹⁸⁵ This would formally be a case of polysemy.

¹⁸⁴ See also 1 Chron 16:30; Ps 97:4; 114:7.

¹⁸⁵ If this is the case, it is not entirely clear in which direction this development might have taken place. In other words, because we do not have access to the historical development of the word, we cannot determine with certainty which sense—“to have labor pains, writhe in anguish (in labor)” or “to tremble, be in anguish”—came first and developed into the other. It is possible that the original sense was “to have labor pains,” and the frequent usage with these unusual a-elements became so widespread that the senses “to be in anguish, to tremble” became part of the lexical meaning or semantic range of the verb הִילֵךְ in the qal. Alternatively, it is possible that the broader sense “to tremble, be in anguish” came first and through frequent application to the situation of a woman in labor eventually came to have the more specific sense

Using the example in the previous paragraph and taking *חיל* as having a distinct sense, “to tremble, be in anguish,” would result in the translation: “they will tremble and be in anguish [חילו] because of you” (Deut 2:25). In the case of polysemy, this separate sense may or may not call forth the idea of “having labor pains” from which it may have been motivated in any particular context. That is, the audience may not have in mind the image of a woman in labor when they find *חיל* in this context used of a non-female referent.

In the *poel*, *polal*, and *hophal*, the sense of the verb *חיל*, with a few exceptions, is more straightforward and is generally related to giving birth. The *poel* is usually transitive and has the sense “to bring forth” or “to give birth.” The b-element, which appears in transitive or passive syntaxes such as the *poel*, *polal*, and *hophal*, designates the person or thing brought forth, while the a-element, as noted above, is the one who is bringing forth. The *poel* can be used literally, of a doe (אילה) bringing forth its calf (Job 39:1),¹⁸⁶ or metaphorically, of Sarah bringing forth Israel (Isa 51:2)¹⁸⁷ and of God bringing forth Israel (Deut 32:18) as well as the earth and the world (ארץ ותבל, Ps 90:2). This sense also can be applied to acts of nature, as in Prov 25:23: רוח צפון תחולל גשם “The north wind brings forth rain.” As noted above, the *poel* occurs once with irregular syntax and a causative sense, in the line קול יהוה יחולל אילות “the voice of Yahweh causes does to give birth” (Ps 29:9).¹⁸⁸ In most of the *poel* occurrences, it is unclear whether the sense

“to have labor pains, writhe in anguish (in labor).” Unfortunately, the limitations of this thesis do not allow further discussion of this question.

¹⁸⁶ Here the verb is formally intransitive, but one can infer that the doe is bringing forth her offspring.

¹⁸⁷ The fact that the element being “brought forth” is “you” (2mp), referring to the people of Israel, suggests that, even though the a-element here is a female, this is also a metaphorical usage of *חיל*.

¹⁸⁸ Various glosses are offered by the lexica to depict the causal nuance: “to cause labor pains” (*HALOT*, s.v. “חיל I”); “bring into labour” (*DCH*, s.v. “חיל I”); “in Wehen versetzen” (*Ges*¹⁸, s.v. “חיל I”). Others have proposed emending אילות “does” to אילות “terebinths” (see *DCH*, s.v. “אילה I”), understanding אילות as an

includes the aspect of labor pains or anguish frequently in view in the qal. In some passages, חיל (polel) seems to be used almost synonymously with ילד (Deut 32:18; Job 39:1; Ps 90:2).

In the polal, which is the passive of the polel, חיל again generally has a more straightforward sense connected to childbirth: “to be brought forth.” This sense can be used literally to refer to a person being born (Ps 51:7[5]; Job 15:7) or applied to “wisdom” (חֵכְמָה) being brought forth “when there were no deeps” (בְּאֵינִי־תְהוֹמוֹת, Prov 8:24) and “before the hills” (לִפְנֵי גְבָעוֹת, Prov 8:25). The polal is also used in Job 26:5, but here this sense is less suitable to the context: חוֹלְלוּ הַרְפָּאִים וְחוֹלְלוּ מִתַּחַת מַיִם וְשִׁכְנֵיהֶם “The dead were brought forth”¹⁸⁹ is syntactically possible, it is semantically difficult and seems unlikely in the context, where a sense related to anguish or trembling may be more appropriate (e.g., “the dead were made to tremble”).¹⁹⁰ Similar to the usual polal sense is the hophal. In its one hophal occurrence, חיל has a passive sense that is used metaphorically with the b-element אָרֶץ, referring probably to the people of the land: הֲיִחַל אֶרֶץ בְּיוֹם: “Will a land be brought forth in a day?” (Isa 66:8).¹⁹¹ Thus, in most occurrences of the polel, polal, and

alternate form of the usual plural, אֵילִים. חוֹלְלוּ is then understood as having the sense “shake” or “make whirl.” For this reading, see Scharbert, *Schmerz*, 22 (“die Stimme Jahwes läßt Eichen erbeben”); NET (“the LORD’s shout bends the large trees”); NIV (“the voice of the LORD twists the oaks”); NRSVue (“the voice of the LORD causes the oaks to whirl”; see also RSV); ESV margin (“makes the oaks to shake”).

¹⁸⁹ See KJV, “dead things are formed.”

¹⁹⁰ So ESV, NET, NASB, NJPS, NRSVue, NKJV (“the dead tremble”), NIV (“the dead are in deep anguish”); BDB, s.v. “חיל I” (“be made to writhe”); *HALOT*, s.v. “חיל I” (“to be made to tremble”); *DCH*, s.v. “חיל I” (“be brought to trembling”).

¹⁹¹ The syntax of the hophal, along with the modifying phrase בְּיוֹם “in a day” and the parallel with a niph'al form of חיל, points towards the hophal having this sense that is similar to the polal. The disagreement in gender between the verb (3ms) and the subject אָרֶץ (fs) does not present a significant difficulty, as such variation occurs frequently when the verb precedes a singular feminine subject (GKC §145).

hophal, חיל seems to have a sense that is related to giving birth. The use of the polal in Job 26:5, however, suggests that perhaps the polal is polysemous.

Hiphil forms of חיל occur only twice, both in a single verse (Ps 29:8). In both occurrences, Yahweh or Yahweh's voice is the subject of the verb (d-element), while the wilderness is the object (a-element) experiencing the action of the verb. The hiphil seems to be causative, having a sense such as "to make a be in anguish, writhe, tremble": קול יהוה יתיל מדבר יהוה מדבר קדש "The voice of Yahweh makes the wilderness writhe/tremble; Yahweh makes the wilderness of Kadesh writhe/tremble." It is difficult to know whether there is any semantic association with labor pangs in the hiphil, since the only two occurrences have מדבר as the a-element. However, as noted above, these hiphil uses (Ps 29:8) are followed in Ps 29:9 by an unusual usage of the polel with a causative sense (קול יהוה יחולל אילות) "the voice of Yahweh causes does to give birth"). Perhaps the occurrence of חיל alongside יחולל would bring to mind for the audience the image of childbirth, inviting them to picture the wilderness as writhing or trembling as a woman or animal might while in labor.

Occasionally the reason for or cause of חיל is made explicit through a preposition such as מן, sometimes joined with פני or לפני, designating a c-element before or because of whom one experiences anguish, pain, or trembling. Four times the agent in such prepositional phrases is Yahweh (1 Chron 16:30; Ps 96:9; 114:7; Jer 5:22); twice it is another group of people (Israel, Deut 2:25; army, Joel 2:6). With Yahweh as the c-element, חיל seems to have a more positive sense ("tremble" in awe), while in the latter the sense seems to be more related to anguish or fearful trembling. Elsewhere, the preposition מן occurs with מן-היורים, "the archers," as its object: ויחולל מן-היורים "And he was in

anguish because of the archers” (1 Sam 31:3 // 1 Chron 10:3).¹⁹² In one context, the cause of anguish is specified with a phrase using the particle *כי* *קָמָה עַל־בָּבֶל׃* “And the land shakes and writhes in anguish, because the purposes of Yahweh stood against Babylon to make the land of Babylon a waste without inhabitant” (Jer 51:29).

Often, the source or cause of *חיל* is not syntactically marked but is implied in the context or “by the temporal sequence.”¹⁹³ In Jer 5:3, for example, it is implied that *חיל* would be a response to being struck (*נכה*, *hiphil*): *הִכִּיתָהּ אֹתָם וְלֹא־חִלּוּ׃* “You struck them, but they were not in anguish.” As noted above, in a number of places, *חיל* seems to be a reaction to hearing distressing news. For example, in Isa 23:5, anguish is a reaction to hearing the news of God’s judgment on Tyre: *כַּאֲשֶׁר־שָׁמַע לְמִצְרַיִם יְחִילוּ כְשָׁמַע צָר׃* “When the report comes to Egypt, they will writhe in anguish [יְחִילוּ] at the report of Tyre.”¹⁹⁴ In such cases, it seems that the reaction is one of fear. The mountains or waters similarly tremble or writhe in anguish in response to seeing God or his lightnings.¹⁹⁵

At least once, the anguish seems to be not a response but a judgment from God: *וְנִתְתִי אֵשׁ בְּמִצְרַיִם חֵדָל תְּחִיל׃* “And I will set fire to Egypt; Pelusium will writhe in great anguish [חֵדָל תְּחִיל], and Thebes will be broken into, and

¹⁹² Alternatively, if *יִחַל* is read as a verb from *חָלָה*, the sense could be “he was wounded/injured by the archers.”

¹⁹³ Bauman, 4:346.

¹⁹⁴ See also Deut 2:25; Esth 4:4 (*hithpalpel*); Jer 4:19; 51:29; Joel 2:6; Zech 9:5.

¹⁹⁵ “The waters saw you, God, the waters saw you, [and] they were in anguish [יִחִילוּ]; yes, the abysses trembled” (Ps 77:17[16]); “His lightnings light up the world, the earth sees and it writhes in anguish [תִּחַל]” (Ps 97:4); “The mountains saw you and writhed in anguish [יִחִילוּ]; a downpour of waters flowed past; the deep gave its voice; it lifted its hands on high” (Hab 3:10).

Memphis will face enemies [or distress] by day” (Ezek 30:16). While it is possible that Pelusium’s anguish is a reaction to seeing the fire and other distressing situations in Egypt, Thebes, and Memphis, it seems best to understand חיל תחיל as an element of God’s judgment, especially given the previous verse, which reads “and I will pour out my wrath upon Pelusium, the refuge of Egypt, and I will cut off the multitude of Thebes” (30:15). In this context, it seems that God’s wrath being poured out is the cause of Pelusium’s great writhing in anguish.

Parallel Terms

חיל appears frequently with terms for bearing or giving birth; in a third of its uses, other terms in the semantic field of childbirth occur in parallel with חיל or in the immediate context (יִלְד: Deut 32:18; Job 15:7; 39:1; Ps 90:2; Isa 23:4; 26:18; 45:10; 54:1; 66:7, 8[2x];¹⁹⁶ חָבַל: Isa 13:8; 26:17; 66:7; בָּכַר: Jer 4:31; יָחַם: Ps 51:7[5]; הָרָה [adj.]: Isa 26:17; הָרָה [vb.]: 26:18). חיל is also found in parallel with terms describing trembling or fear (רָגַז, Deut 2:25; Ps 77:17[16]; רָעַשׁ, Jer 51:29; יָרָא, Jer 5:22; בָּהַל, Isa 13:8). חיל seems to have a more positive connotation in the two contexts where it occurs in parallel with the imperative הַשְׁתַּחֲוּ לַיהוָה “Worship Yahweh” (1 Chron 16:29–30; Ps 96:9).

Occasionally, חיל appears alongside numerous terms for pregnancy or childbirth, as in Isa 23:4, where the sea speaks metaphorically, saying: לֹא-תִלְדָּתִי וְלֹא-יִלְדָּתִי וְלֹא-גַבְלָתִי: “I did not תִּלְדָּתִי, and I did not give birth, and I did not bring up young men, I did not raise up young women.” Here, חיל seems to denote a stage in the process of childbearing/childrearing that occurs perhaps before giving birth (יִלְדָּתִי) and raising up

¹⁹⁶ Both חיל and ילד occur twice in this verse.

(רֹמְמָתִי, גִּבְלָתִי) young children. In Isa 26:18, חֵיל occurs between הָרָה (“be pregnant, conceive”) and יָלַד “we were pregnant, we חָלַנוּ, we brought forth the like of wind”), suggesting חֵיל occurs before יָלַד and after conception. In these and other contexts, חֵיל is closely associated with yet differentiated from יָלַד as well as other terms in the semantic field of childbearing.

In some contexts, parallels seem to specifically draw out the notion of pain associated with childbirth. While חֵיל in Isa 26:18 could simply have the sense “to be in labor,” its usage in the previous verse seems to highlight the aspect of pain or anguish (26:17):

כְּמוֹ הָרָה תִּקְרִיב לִלְדוֹת	“17 Like a pregnant woman who draws near to giving birth,
תַּחֲוֵיל	who writhes in pain in labor,
תִּזְעַק בַּחֲבָלֶיהָ	who cries out with her labor pains;
כֵּן הָיִינוּ מִפְּנֵי יְהוָה	thus were we before you, Yahweh.
הָרִינוּ	18 We were pregnant,
חָלַנוּ	we writhed in pain in labor,
כְּמוֹ יָלַדְנוּ רֵיחַ	we gave birth to the like of wind.”

The parallel with תִּזְעַק בַּחֲבָלֶיהָ, which depicts a woman screaming in agony and pain, suggests that חֵיל, as a co-referential term, may likewise bring into view the anguish/pain of labor. In Isa 26:17–18, then, Israel seems to be comparing herself to a woman about to give birth that writhes and cries out because of the agonizing pain of labor.¹⁹⁷ Similarly, in Isa 66:7, the phrase בְּטֶרֶם תַּחֲוֵיל is parallel with יָבֹא חֲבָל לָהּ “before her labor pain

¹⁹⁷ See also Jer 4:31, where the expression כְּחֹלֶה is parallel with כְּמִבְּיָהּ “like one bearing her first child” (כְּמִבְּיָהּ) “For I heard a voice like חֹלֶה, distress like one bearing her first child”). While the parallel might suggest חֹלֶה denotes only the notion of childbearing, the mention of יָבֹא in the context indicates that חֵיל probably again has in view specifically the anguish or pain of labor.

came upon her.”¹⁹⁸ The co-referential lines are probably mutually amplifying, working together to point to the anguish/pain of labor.

Elsewhere, חיל occurs alongside terms denoting trembling or shaking, such as רגז, as in Ps 77:17[16] (“the waters saw you, God, the waters saw you, they יִהִילוּ, yes, the abysses trembled [יִרְגְּזוּ]”) or Deut 2:25 (וַרְגְּזוּ וְחָלוּ מִפְּנֵיהֶם) “they trembled and חָלוּ before you”). חיל similarly appears in parallel with ירא “to fear”: “Do you not fear me?” declares Yahweh. “Do you not תִּהְיֶילוּ before me?” (Hab 3:10).¹⁹⁹ In Ps 55:5[4], the parallel line as well as the following verse also associate חיל with fear.

לְבִי יִחִיל בְּקִרְבִּי	“5[4] My heart יִחִיל within me,
וְאִמּוֹת מָוֶת נִפְלוּ עָלַי:	and the terrors of death fall upon me.
יִרְאָה וְרָעַד יָבֵא בִּי	6[5] Fear and trembling come upon me,
וְתַכְסֵּנִי פְלִצּוֹת:	and shuddering overwhelms me.

This context, where four terms related to fear occur alongside חיל, paints a vivid picture that clearly connects the psalmist’s experience of חיל to an overwhelming feeling of fear and trembling. Such parallels indicate that, in these contexts, חיל likely refers to an action associated with fear or anxiety. While not necessarily synonyms of חיל, the parallel items—whether childbirth (or specifically labor) terminology or terms for fear and trembling—can be useful in understanding what image חיל evokes in various contexts.

¹⁹⁸ The image in this verse is of a woman who gives birth quickly and with ease (בְּטָרֵם תִּחִיל יְלֵדָה בְּטָרֵם יָבוֹא) “Before תִּחִיל she brought forth, before birth pain came to her, she gave birth to a male child”), which is probably what leads to the question in the next verse: “Who heard such a thing? Who saw such things? For was a land brought forth [יִזְחַל] in one day? Was a nation born in a moment? For she had labor pains [תִּלְהָה], yes, Zion brought forth her son.”

¹⁹⁹ See also Zech 9:5: תִּרְאֵה אֲשֶׁקֶלְיוֹן וְתִירָא וְעֵזָה וְתִחִיל מְאֹד, “Ashkelon will see and will be afraid, and Gaza, and will writhe in great anguish.”

These two associations occur together in Isa 13:8, where *חיל* is parallel with terms for both fear and labor pains:

וַנִּבְהָלוּ צָרִים וְחֲבָלִים יֹאחֲזִוּ כִּי־לָקְחָה יְחִילוֹן אִישׁ אֶל־רֵעֵהוּ יִתְמָהוּ פְּגֵי לְהִבִּים פְּנֵיהֶם	“And they will be terrified, pangs and labor pains will seize them; like one bringing forth they will They will look in astonishment at one another, their faces will be faces of flames.”
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The parallel with *נִבְהָלוּ* might suggest that *חיל* should have the sense “to tremble” here; however, the parallel with terms for labor pangs, as well as the modifying expression *כִּי־לָקְחָה*, suggest the image is one of a woman writhing in pain during labor. The metaphor thus combines these different ideas, painting an image of a people so frightened that they are writhing in pain and anguish like a woman in labor. The final two lines further build on this vivid image, describing additional physiological symptoms of the fear/anguish.

Post-Biblical Hebrew

The determination of post-biblical uses of the verb *חיל* is somewhat difficult due to the confusion surrounding the root *חיל*. The verb *חיל* occurs at least three times in the DSS and twice in Ben Sira. In Ben Sira, the verb occurs once in the qal in a phrase reminiscent of some biblical uses: *וַיַּחֲלוּ כִּי־לֹדָה*: “And they had labor pains/writhed in anguish like a woman giving birth” (Sir 48:19); the subject, or a-element, here is the people of Judah. *חיל* also occurs once in the hiphil, with *ארץ* as the a-element and *קול רעמו* as the b-element: *קול רעמו יחיל ארצו*: “The voice of his thunder makes his land tremble/writhe in anguish” (Sir 43:16). The usage here is similar to the usage of the hiphil in Ps 29:8 *קול יְהוָה יַחֲלִי מִדְּבַר יְהוָה יִתְחַל מִדְּבַר קָדֵשׁ* (“the voice of Yahweh makes the wilderness tremble/writhe in anguish; Yahweh makes the wilderness of Kadesh tremble/writhe in anguish”).

In the DSS, the verb חיל appears in the qal in 4QpMic 1:2, a text that echoes Mic 4:10: חולי וגחי בת ציון כיולדה: “Have pain and push (it) out, daughter of Zion, like a woman giving birth.”²⁰⁰ There is another occurrence of the qal in 4QShir^b 37:3, with הארץ as the a-element: [יזדעזעו יס] ודוּתָם וּתְחוּל הָאָרֶץ “And their foundations will be shaken, and the earth will tremble/writhe in anguish.”²⁰¹ The usage here is similar to the biblical occurrences in Ps 97:4 and Jer 51:29, where ארץ is also the a-element. The verb also occurs in the hiphil in 1QH^a 11:8 in the phrase וחבל נמרץ על משבריה להחיל בכור הריה “and intensive tribulation (is) upon the opening of her womb to cause anguish [להחיל] in the womb of the pregnant one.”²⁰²

Semantic Conclusions

The discussion above suggested that there are at least two possible explanations for the various usages of the verb חיל in the qal. The verb may have a singular sense: the singular sense could be either “to have labor pains, writhe in pain/anguish (in labor),” which is then applied metaphorically in some contexts to different (non-female) referents, or “to tremble, be in anguish,” with an extended usage in certain contexts to the birthing process.²⁰³ Alternatively, the verb may be polysemous, with “to have labor pains, writhe in pain/anguish (in labor)” being only one of multiple possible senses for the verb,

²⁰⁰ Martínez and Tigchelaar, 335.

²⁰¹ Maurice Baillet, *Qumrân Grotte 4.III (4Q482–4Q520)*, DJD VII (Oxford: Clarendon, 1983), 238.

²⁰² Charlesworth et al., *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, 5A: 125.

²⁰³ If the verb has a singular sense, we would need more diachronic information in order to determine which of these senses was original.

alongside “to tremble” or “to be in anguish” more broadly.²⁰⁴ It is difficult to determine with certainty which phenomenon—metaphorical/extended usage or polysemy—is at work with the verb *חיל*, though the latter seems plausible. In general, for polysemy to work, context must play a significant role in identifying meaning.²⁰⁵ And while there are some cases where it is not entirely clear which sense of *חיל* is in view,²⁰⁶ it is nevertheless true that for most occurrences of the verb, the context provides sufficient evidence for the audience to identify which of these senses is being used, indicating that polysemy is at least plausible.²⁰⁷

If these are distinct senses, then in the cases where the sense “to tremble” is used, there may be no implied connection to childbirth pain; that is, the verb is not necessarily used “because situations of anxiety or fear...outwardly recall the manifestations of

²⁰⁴ BDB essentially treats the relevant occurrences as having the singular sense “twist, writhe” that is applied to a variety of referents; BDB lists the categories “2a. Twist, writhe: in pain, esp. childbirth,” “2b. Twist, writhe: fig. be in severe pain, or anguish,” and “2c. Twist, writhe: in contrition” (BDB, s.v. “חיל I”); as noted above, BDB treats *חיל* and *חיל* as a single verb; additional senses listed in BDB for this verb include “1. dance” and “3. whirl,” which account for occurrences that are viewed in this thesis as instances of a distinct verb [*חיל*]). *HALOT*, on the other hand, treats the verb *חיל* as polysemous, listing the senses “1. to be in labour,” “2a. to writhe,” and “2b. to tremble” (s.v. “חיל I”). See also Scharbert, *Schmerz*, 21–26.

²⁰⁵ Ullmann writes of polysemy that “the main guarantee of its working is the influence of *context*. No matter how many meanings a word may have in the dictionary, there will be no confusion if only one of them can make sense in any given situation” (Stephen Ullmann, *Semantics: An Introduction to the Science of Meaning* [New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1979], 168 [emphasis original]).

²⁰⁶ As noted above, for example, in Isa 13:8, *חיל* is parallel with *בהל* “to be dismayed/terrified,” which might lead one to assume the sense would be “to tremble.” However, it is here also parallel with *צָרִים וְהַבְּלִים יִאֱחָזוּן* “pangs and labor pains will seize them” and modified by the phrase *כִּי־לֵדָה* “like a woman giving birth,” suggesting the sense might be “to have labor pains, writhe in pain (in labor).” In other words, assuming the word is polysemous, there is some ambiguity regarding which sense is being employed in this context. It is possible that this ambiguity is intentional. As discussed below, there is also potential ambiguity in Isa 23:4–5.

²⁰⁷ This may be a case where “the lexicographer has to distinguish more or less arbitrarily between different shades of the same meaning and different meanings of the same word” (Ullmann, *Semantics*, 169). Given the limitations of this thesis, I am unable to explore this question in depth.

labor.”²⁰⁸ While it seems likely that the senses “tremble” and “have labor pains” are at least related in origin, based on physiological similarities between the movements of a woman in labor and a person trembling in fear, such a connection may not have been apparent to ordinary language users. In other words, the connection between these senses etymologically is transparent, but it is not necessarily the case that a speaker using *הָיִל* with the sense “to tremble,” or his audience, would have called to mind a comparison to a woman writhing in labor; the connection may or may not have been evident in actual usage unless attention was drawn to it.²⁰⁹

Different OT books seem to utilize *הָיִל* in different ways. In Isaiah, for example, where *הָיִל* appears 11 times in the qal, the verb is most frequently used in the sense “to have labor pains, writhe in anguish (in labor).” It often occurs in contexts alongside other terms associated with childbearing. Only once is there not an explicit connection with childbearing in the same verse (Isa 23:5).²¹⁰ Often, the sense “to have labor pains, writhe

²⁰⁸ Bauman, 4:345–46. See also Scharbert, who goes a step further in positing a conceptual connection between the different senses when he writes, “psychologically significant is a certain connection between pain and fear, which finds its linguistic expression in” the roots *הָיִל*, *חָבַל*, and *צָיַר* (*Schmerz*, 27; “Psychologisch bedeutsam ist eine gewisse Verbindung von Schmerz und Angst, welche in diesen Wurzeln ihren sprachlichen Ausdruck findet”). However, the fact that the same verb can be used in reference to both pain and fear only reveals something about the semantics and range of use of the word; it does not necessarily indicate anything about the psychological or conceptual connection between these experiences.

²⁰⁹ Attention seems to be drawn to this connection between the senses in Isa 13:8, discussed above.

²¹⁰ Looking at Isa 23:5 on its own—*כְּאֲשֶׁר־שָׁמַע לְמִצְרָיִם יִחִילוּ כְּשָׁמַע צָר* “When the report [comes] to Egypt, they will *יִחִילוּ* at the report of Tyre”—the verb *יִחִילוּ* here would seem to have the sense “to tremble” or “to be in anguish” (so BDB; Ges¹⁸). However, the previous verse also employs *יִחִילוּ*, here clearly in the sense “to have labor pains”: *בְּוֹשֵׁי צִיּוֹן כִּי־אָמַר יָם מְעוֹז הָיָם לֹא־תִלְתִּי וְלֹא־יִלְדֹתַי וְלֹא גִבְלֹתַי בַּחוּרִים רוֹמְמֹתַי בְּתוּלוֹת* “Be ashamed, Sidon, for the sea has spoken, the stronghold of the sea, saying, ‘I did not have labor pains [*תִּלְתִּי*], and I did not bring forth, and I did not bring up young men, I did not raise up young women” (23:4). Though the subject matter shifts in 23:5, the occurrence of *יִחִילוּ* in 23:4 with the sense “to have labor pains” might require the reader to pause and consider which sense is employed in 23:5. Perhaps this combination indicates that we should take Isa 23:5 as a metaphorical application of the sense “to have labor pains” (so *HALOT*), rather than an example of Isaiah employing a different sense—that is, perhaps Isaiah is inviting us to picture the people of Egypt acting like a woman writhing in pain during labor when they hear of the report about Tyre’s destruction. Alternatively, it is possible that Isaiah is employing two distinct meanings

in anguish (in labor)” is applied metaphorically by Isaiah to describe a city, the sea, or a people group giving birth. In such cases, the idea of pain or anguish is still likely present, but the focus of the metaphor seems to be on the act of bringing forth through labor.

Jeremiah, on the other hand, who uses the *qal* of *היל* five times, seems to employ a broader range of meanings in his use of this verb. *היל* is once used by Jeremiah in the sense “to have labor pains, writhe in anguish in labor”: *כִּי קוֹל כְּחוֹלָה שְׁמַעְתִּי צָרָה כְּמִבְכִּיָּה קוֹל*: “For I heard a sound like a woman having labor pains/writhing in anguish, distress like one bearing her first child, the sound of the daughter of Zion gasping for breath, stretching out her hands, ‘Woe is me, for my soul is faint before murderers’” (4:31). Elsewhere, Jeremiah seems to employ the verb in the broader sense “be in anguish, writhe in pain”; this sense is used in reference to Jeremiah’s own reaction to a distressing situation (4:19)²¹¹ and the result of being physically struck (5:3).²¹² Finally, the verb in Jeremiah sometimes seems to have the sense “to tremble,” describing the land trembling or writhing because of the ruin of Babylon (51:29) or people trembling in fear and awe before Yahweh (5:22). Jeremiah thus seems to make use of the full range of meaning of the verb *היל*.

By way of summary, the verb *היל* in the *qal* is concrete and, at least in some contexts, fairly vivid, depicting people or nature trembling or writhing in anguish/pain. In some cases, the context indicates that the referent of the anguish/writhing is clearly

(“have labor pains” in 23:4 and “tremble” or “be in anguish” in 23:5), intentionally drawing attention to the semantic connection between the two senses.

²¹¹ *מַעֲיוּ מַעֲיוּ אֲחֻלָּה קִירוֹת לִבִּי הִמְהַלְקִי לִבִּי לֹא אֲתַרְגֵּשׁ כִּי קוֹל שׁוֹפָר שְׁמַעְתִּי נִפְשִׁי תְרוּעַת מִלְחָמָה* “My bowels, my bowels, I writhe in pain [אֲחֻלָּה]! The walls of my heart! My heart murmurs to me; I am not silent, for I hear the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war.”

²¹² *הִכִּיתָם אָתָּם וְלֹא-תָלִוּ* “You struck them, but they did not writhe in pain.”

physical pain (1 Sam 31:3 // 1 Chron 10:3), including in cases where the verb is used of a woman in labor in a metaphorical image (Isa 26:17; Jer 4:31). In the two cases where an individual describes himself or his heart as “writhing in pain” (רָיַל) (Jer 4:19; Ps 55:5[4]), the pain likely has both physical and psychological aspects. The same is true of many occurrences where the qal describes peoples being in anguish or trembling as a result of God’s judgment or in response to distressing news; in such cases, רָיַל provides a concrete image of anguish that likely represents both physical and mental suffering, probably with a nuance of fear. The metaphorical application of this sense to waters, mountains, or the earth paints a vivid picture of these elements of nature “trembling” or “writhing in anguish” in response to God. In the hithpolel, the verb again seems to be fairly concrete, depicting a wicked person “writhing in pain” all his days (Job 15:20).

In other stems, such as the polel, polal, and hophal, the sense of the verb רָיַל is a bit less vivid. Like many instances of the qal, most occurrences of רָיַל in these stems seem to be clearly related to giving birth. However, unlike the qal, which often seems to highlight especially the pain or anguish of childbirth, the nuance of pain does not seem to be present, or at least in focus, in most uses of the polel, polal, and hophal; in these stems, the sense is typically simply “to give birth, bring forth” or “to be brought forth.” However, in one context, the polal has a distinct sense associated with trembling or writhing (polal, Job 26:5), suggesting that perhaps in the qal also the senses “to tremble” and “to be in anguish” should be understood as distinct from “to writhe in pain in labor.”

חַיִל (*Noun*)

Morphology

The noun חַיִל, from the root חַיִל, occurs six times in the Hebrew Bible, as well as once in post-biblical Hebrew. The noun is masculine and is always singular in its six occurrences. The Akkadian cognate *hīlū* occurs only in the plural and has the sense “labor pains.”²¹³

Syntactic Function

The noun חַיִל functions always as the subject of a verb or in apposition to the subject of a verb. In all of its biblical uses, the noun is indefinite.

Associative Field

Contexts of Use

חַיִל is only used in poetic contexts, occurring once in the Psalms, four times in the prophets, and once in Exodus in the song of Moses.

Syntagmatic Relations

חַיִל functions as the subject (or in apposition to the subject²¹⁴) of the verb חִזַק (hiphil) three times and אָחַז twice (Exod 15:14; Ps 48:7[6]). Once, it is in apposition to

²¹³ *CAD*, 6:189.

²¹⁴ As in רָעָדָה אֶתְחַזְּקֵם שָׁם חַיִל כַּיּוֹמָה “Trembling seized them there, חַיִל like one bringing forth” (Ps 48:7[6]); חַיִל does not syntactically function here as the subject but is in apposition to the clause. Semantically, חַיִל either further specifies the subject (“trembling—anguish like one bringing forth—seized them there”) or the verb should be implied in the second line (“trembling seized them there; חַיִל [seized them] like one bringing forth”).

the subject of בּוֹא (Jer 22:23). The terms that it occurs in apposition to include רַעֲדָה “trembling” (Ps 48:7[6]), צָרָה “distress” (Jer 6:24; 50:49), and הַבְּלִיִּים “birth pangs” (Jer 22:23).

In all but one occurrence (Exod 15:14), הָיִל is modified by the prepositional phrase כַּיֹּלֵדָה “like one giving birth,” establishing a clear semantic connection between הָיִל and childbirth. While frequently compared to a woman in labor, the one being affected by הָיִל is never actually a woman. Rather, the simile כַּיֹּלֵדָה הָיִל is used figuratively to describe anguish or pain affecting people more broadly: it seizes the inhabitants of Philistia (Exod 15:14) and kings (Ps 48:7[6]), takes hold of the king of Babylon (Jer 50:43) or Jerusalem (Mic 4:9),²¹⁵ and comes upon the inhabitant of Lebanon (Jer 22:23).

Apparently, the image of the pain or anguish of a woman giving birth is an appropriate one to describe the experience of various peoples, often in response to some distressing news or sight. That הָיִל is a reaction is often implied in the temporal sequence. This can be clearly seen in Exod 15:14, where הָיִל is used in a description of people’s reaction to hearing of God’s strength and wonders displayed in the exodus: “the people heard; they trembled; anguish/pain [הָיִל] seized the inhabitants of Philistia.”²¹⁶ The following verses further depict the fearful response of other nations, demonstrating the connection between הָיִל and fear or trembling in this context: “then the chiefs of Edom are dismayed; trembling seizes the leaders of Moab; all the inhabitants of Canaan melted

²¹⁵ The “us” in Jer 6:24, who are the object of the verb חָזַק in the phrase צָרָה הִחַזְקוּתָנוּ הָיִל כַּיֹּלֵדָה, may also be referring to the people of Jerusalem or of Israel more broadly; the prophet Jeremiah is likely speaking as a representative of the people.

²¹⁶ While technically the object of hearing is not specified (שָׁמְעוּ עַמִּים רַבִּינָו הָיִל אֲזָזוּ יְשָׁבֵי פְלִשְׁתָּה), it can be implied from the context, as the previous verses describe God’s mighty work of consuming Pharaoh and his army in the Red Sea after leading Israel through it in safety (15:1–12).

away. Terror and dread fell upon them; because of your great power, they are silent as a stone” (Exod 15:15–16). When the people of the other lands hear how God had wiped out the powerful Egyptian army, their response is one of great fear, trembling, and *חיל*.

Elsewhere, being seized by anguish/pain is a response to recognizing the power of other nations. Distress (*צרה*) and anguish/pain (*חיל*) take hold of both the king of Babylon (Jer 50:43) and the people of Israel (Jer 6:24) in reaction to their hearing the distressing report of an army coming from the north.²¹⁷

Parallel Terms

In addition to its frequently being accompanied by the phrase *כִּילֵדָה*, the noun *חיל* is also found alongside the expression *יד + רפה*, likely an idiom used figuratively for losing heart or energy:²¹⁸ “We heard the report of him; our hands dropped; distress took hold of us, anguish/pain [*חיל*] like a woman giving birth” (Jer 6:24).²¹⁹ As already noted, the noun *חיל* also occurs with words for trembling (*רגז*, Exod 15:14; *רעדה*, Ps 48:7[6]).

²¹⁷ See also Ps 48:7[6], where foreign kings are seized by *חיל* upon seeing the magnificence of Jerusalem: “5[4] For behold, kings assembled; they advanced together. 6[5] (The more) they themselves saw, the more they were astounded; they were disturbed; they hurried away. Trembling seized them there, anguish/pain [*חיל*] like one giving birth” (Heb. *כִּילֵדָה אֶחָדָם שָׁם חָיִל*).

²¹⁸ BDB, s.v. “*רפה*.”

²¹⁹ The same language is used of the king of Babylon responding to the report of might nation coming against Babylon (Jer 50:43): “The king of Babylon heard the report of them, and his hands dropped; distress took hold of him, anguish/pain [*חיל*] like a woman giving birth.”

Post-Biblical Hebrew

The noun *חיל* probably occurs once in the DSS, in a phrase that echoes Mic 4:9 ([חיל כיוולדה] [החזו] יקכה, 4QpMic 1:2).

Semantic Conclusions

Based on the observations above, the noun *חיל* seems to be a concrete term that can designate some type of intense pain or anguish, often associated with fear. The noun is always found in vivid, forceful images of people experiencing fear; in such imagery, *חיל* is often said to actively seize or take hold of a person or peoples. *חיל* could have the broad sense “anguish/pain” or “writhing (in pain).”²²⁰ Alternatively, given its frequent association with childbirth, the noun may have the more specific sense “labor pain/pangs,” which is then applied metaphorically to various situations of distress. It is possible that the noun is polysemous, having a more general sense (“writhing, anguish, pain”) in Exod 15:14 and a narrower sense “labor pain” in its other five occurrences, where it occurs with the modifier *כְּיִלְדָה*.²²¹ However, the similarity of the context of Exod 15:14 to the other texts in which *חיל* is used would perhaps indicate that the sense is similar here. In any case, whether the sense is “labor pains” or “pain/writhing” more broadly, the noun seems to depict physical pain/anguish that is so intense that it can be compared to the extreme physical pain of a woman in labor. This vivid term for pain is

²²⁰ For all occurrences, *DCH* offers the sense “pain, writhing,” while *HALOT* focuses especially on the element of fear with the gloss “fear and pain.”

²²¹ Ges¹⁸, s.v. “חיל,” offers the gloss “Geburtswehen” for all occurrences except Exod 15:14, where the sense proposed is “übertr. Beben vor Angst.” See also BDB, who lists the sense “writhing (contortions of fear)” for Exod 15:14 and “anguish” for all other occurrences.

used figuratively to portray physical and/or emotional anguish that is often associated with fear.

תִּלְתָּלָהּ

Morphology

The noun תִּלְתָּלָהּ occurs four times in the Hebrew Bible and three times in post-biblical Hebrew. The noun is feminine and always occurs in singular form.

Syntactic Function

The noun תִּלְתָּלָהּ functions as a subject or direct object of a verb and as the subject in a verbless clause. The noun is indefinite in all of its occurrences.

Associative Field

Contexts of Use

All four occurrences of תִּלְתָּלָהּ are in prophetic literature. Most are found in poetic contexts.

Syntagmatic Relations

תִּלְתָּלָהּ occurs as the subject with the verb היה twice (Ezek 30:4, 9). In both verses, the predicate is a clause using the preposition בְּ, “in.” תִּלְתָּלָהּ is said to be “in Cush” (בְּכּוּשׁ, Ezek 30:4, 9), probably referring specifically to the people of Cush.²²² It is also used as the direct object of the verb מלא, with the subject מִתְנַיִ תִּלְתָּלָהּ (“my loins are filled

²²² The 3mp pronoun suffix (בָּהֶם) in Ezek 30:9 refers to Cush.

with תִּלְחָלָה,” Isa 21:3). The noun appears again with מְתַנִּים in a verbless clause: תִּלְחָלָה בְּכָל־מְתַנִּים “Anguish is in all loins” (Nah 2:11[10]). In all occurrences, תִּלְחָלָה is used to describe something experienced by a person or people; twice, it specifically affects the loins (מְתַנִּים) of people.

In Isa 21:3, תִּלְחָלָה fills Isaiah’s loins in response to a terrifying vision of Babylon’s destruction. The previous verse details his vision, and 21:3 begins עַל־כֵּן מְלֹא מְתַנִּים “Therefore my loins are filled with anguish.” The image is of a vision so terrifying that it causes an intense physical reaction. In Ezek 30, the תִּלְחָלָה that is in Cush is also perhaps a reaction to distressing events, though it may alternatively be part of God’s judgment against Cush.²²³ In Ezek 30:4, וְהִיְתָה תִּלְחָלָה בְּכוֹשׁ “and pain/anguish will be in Cush” is parallel with the phrase וּבָאָה הַחֶרֶב בְּמִצְרַיִם “and a sword will come against Egypt.” Here, תִּלְחָלָה may be a separate punishment: Egypt will be punished by the sword, and Cush by pain/anguish (תִּלְחָלָה). However, the temporal clause (בְּנִפְלֵת חָלָל בְּמִצְרַיִם) that modifies the phrase וְהִיְתָה תִּלְחָלָה בְּכוֹשׁ suggests that perhaps the anguish/pain in Cush is a response to the people being slain by the sword: “and anguish/pain will be in Cush when the slain falls in Egypt.” The pain experienced by the people of Cush thus may be a fearful reaction to seeing the devastation around them caused by the sword. This also seems to be the case in Ezek 30:9, where תִּלְחָלָה again appears to be a reaction to hearing of devastation in Egypt: “In that day, messengers will go out from me in ships to startle Cush, (which dwells) securely, and pain/anguish [תִּלְחָלָה] will be in them in the day of Egypt, for behold, it comes.”

²²³ See also the discussion of Ezek 30:16 above.

Parallel Terms

As already noted, in Ezek 30:4, the phrase *וּבָאָה חֶרֶב בְּמִצְרַיִם* “and a sword will come against Egypt” is parallel with *וְהָיְתָה חֲלָחְלָה בְכוֹשׁ* “and anguish/pain will be in Cush.” Elsewhere, *חֲלָחְלָה* is found with the term *צִירִים*: “Therefore, my loins were full of *חֲלָחְלָה*; pangs [*צִירִים*] seized me like the pangs [*צִירִים*] of one giving birth [*יולדה*]” (Isa 21:3). This is the only passage where *חֲלָחְלָה* occurs alongside terminology for labor pains; here, this language is used by Isaiah metaphorically to depict his anguish in response to a disturbing vision. The rest of 21:3, as well as the following verse, offer a further depiction of Isaiah’s physical condition or symptoms: “I was bent down so that I could not hear; I was disturbed so that I could not see. My heart staggers; shuddering overwhelms me; the twilight of my desire has turned into trembling for me” (21:3–4).²²⁴ Nahum 2:11[10] similarly contains a lengthier description of the symptoms associated with the condition of one experiencing *חֲלָחְלָה*: “Emptiness and wasteland and devastation! And a heart faints and knees totter and *חֲלָחְלָה* is in all loins and the faces of all of them gather red [or grow pale].” In this context, *חֲלָחְלָה* in the loins is parallel with the heart fainting or melting (*מָסַס*), knees tottering (*פִּיקָה*), and faces growing pale (*קבצ פֶּאֶרְוִיר*). In both contexts, *חֲלָחְלָה* seems to describe a physical sensation resulting from fear or shock.

Post-Biblical Hebrew

The noun *חֲלָחְלָה* occurs three times in the DSS. In 1QH^a 18:33, it appears in a prepositional phrase with *בְּ* modifying the phrase *וּיִתְהוֹלֵל לְבִי*: “and my heart is mocked by

²²⁴ Heb. גָּשׁוּף עַל-פִּי מִלֵּאֵי מִתְנַל חֲלָחְלָה צִירִים אֶתְוֹנִי כְצִירֵי יוֹלְדָה נַעֲנִיתִי מִשְׁמַע נִבְהַלְתִּי מִרְאֹת: תַּעֲה לְבָבִי פִלְצוֹת בְּעַתְתִּנִּי אֵת. חֲשָׁלִי עִם לִי לְחֶרֶדָה.

anguish [בַּחֲלָהּ]²²⁵ and my loins by trembling. And my moaning goes unto the depth.”²²⁶ וַיִּתְהוֹלֵל לְבִי בַּחֲלָהּ [לה] יְדוּלֵל פֶּתֶן בְּעַלְיוֹ [ו.נ.] “and with angui[sh] a serpent will be raised on hig[h ...].”²²⁷ Similar to some of its biblical usages, חֲלָהּ also occurs once in the DSS with the noun מִתְנַיִם “loins,” in the phrase וַחֲלָהּ בְּכֹל [מתנ...] “and trembling in all loin[s ...],” which is found alongside פִּיק [ב]רְכִים “and shaking of [kn]ees.”²²⁸

Semantic Conclusions

In its four occurrences, the noun functions in vivid images of people experiencing some kind of anguish, often associated with fear. חֲלָהּ can be in a nation/people group or specifically in a person’s loins. While the noun חֲלָהּ appears to be related to חֵיל etymologically, it is not entirely clear whether its sense is actually related to labor pangs. In three of the four uses, there is no other language related to childbearing found in the context, and it thus seems plausible that חֲלָהּ could have the broad sense “pangs/anguish” rather than specifically “labor pain,” at least in these contexts.²²⁹

²²⁵ Or: “my heart fluttered in anxiety” (Martínez and Tigchelaar, 189).

²²⁶ Charlesworth et al., *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, 5A:185. Heb. וַיִּתְהוֹלֵל לְבִי בַּחֲלָהּ וּמוֹתָנִי בְרַעְדָּה וְנִהְמָתִי עַד תְּהִים תְּבוֹא.

²²⁷ Martínez and Tigchelaar, 1057.

²²⁸ Martínez and Tigchelaar, 365.

²²⁹ Most lexica list a singular sense for all four occurrences of the noun: BDB, *DCH* “anguish”; *HALOT* “shaking, trembling.” Ges¹⁸ lists Ezek 30:4, 9 under the category “Zittern, Angst,” while placing Isa 21:3 and Nah 2:11[10] under the sense “Krampf, Schmerz” (s.v. “חֲלָהּ”).

הִילָה

Morphology

The final noun from the root היל, הִילָה, occurs only once in the Hebrew Bible. The feminine noun occurs in the singular in Job 6:10.

Syntactic Function and Associative Field

The noun הִילָה functions as the object of the preposition כִּי, which modifies the verb סלד (piel), also a hapax legomenon. סלד probably means “to spring”²³⁰ or “to jump (for joy).”²³¹ The noun הִילָה itself is also modified by a clause, לֹא יִחְמָוֵל, whose subject may be הִילָה (“pain/anguish [which] spares not”) or, since the verb is masculine and הִילָה likely feminine, God (“pain/anguish [in which] he spares not”).²³² Alternatively, one could take לֹא יִחְמָוֵל “adverbially...virtually as an adjective: in pain unsparing.”²³³ The expression וְאֶסְלַדָּהּ בְּחִילָהּ לֹא יִחְמָוֵל seems to be parenthetical. The larger clause in which it occurs reads:²³⁴ “6:8 Would that my request were fulfilled, and God would grant my hope, 9 that God would be willing to crush me,²³⁵ let loose his hand and cut me off; 10 then my comfort will yet be—and I would jump in/with הִילָה not sparing!—that I have

²³⁰ BDB, s.v. “סלד.”

²³¹ HALOT, s.v. “סלד”; this meaning is supported by LXX (ἀλλομαι).

²³² See Ḥakham, who translates “I will recoil in trembling even if He will not relent” (*Job*, 63).

²³³ Delitzsch, *Job*, 1:113.

²³⁴ Heb. מִי־יִתֵּן סִבּוֹא שְׂאֵלֹתַי וְחִקְנֹתַי יִתֵּן אֱלֹהִים: וַיֹּצֵל אֱלֹהִים וַיִּדְבַּעַנִי יָתֵר יָדוֹ וַיִּבְצַעַנִי: וְחִקְנֹתַי עוֹדוּ וְאֶסְלַדָּהּ בְּחִילָהּ לֹא יִחְמָוֵל. כִּי־לֹא כִסְדֹתַי אֶמְרֵי קְדוֹשׁ.

²³⁵ GKC §120d.

not disowned the words of the holy one.”²³⁶ Since the noun *הַיְלֵה* only occurs once, it is difficult to be certain of its precise meaning. The sense likely is similar to that of the other nouns from the root *היל*. Following Joos’ rule of maximum redundancy, the sense that would disturb the context least is probably simply “pain” or “anguish.”²³⁷

חבל

חבל

Morphology

Hebrew

The verb *חבל*, which occurs only in the *piel*, is found three times in the Hebrew Bible. There are at least two homonymous verbs, *חבל* I “take in pledge,” occurring in the *qal* and *niphal*, and *חבל* II, “act corruptly,” occurring in the *qal*, *niphal*, *piel*, and *pual*.²³⁸ Some propose a fourth homonym, *חבל* IV, “to bind,” occurring only in Job 24:3, as well as Sir 34:6.²³⁹

²³⁶ This translation understands “not having disowned the words of the holy one” as being “Job’s consolation in the midst of death” (Delitzsch, *Job*, 1:113; see also NIV, NASB, NJPS; Ḥakham, *Job*, 63). That is, the “righteousness of Job’s life is the ground (כי) for his ‘comfort’ in the agony of death” (Clines, *Job 1–20*, 174). Alternatively, it is possible that by “comfort,” “speedy death is to be understood, and the use with *כי* gives the ground of his claim for the granting of the wish” (Delitzsch, *Job*, 1:112–13): “this [i.e., death] would yet be my comfort, and I would jump (for joy) in pain/anguish unsparing, for I have not disowned the words of the holy one” (see ESV, NET, KJV; Davidson and Lanchester, 53).

²³⁷ For this rare term, *DCH* proposes the sense “pain, anguish” and *BDB* lists the sense “anguish.” See also Ges¹⁸, “Qual, Schmerz.” *HALOT* suggests the term is a feminine form of *היל*, “labour pains,” but notes the usage here is metaphorical and offers the sense “pain.”

²³⁸ *DCH*, s.v. “חבל II”; “חבל III.” See also *HALOT*, s.v. “חבל IV.” *BDB* lists only two roots, *חבל* I “bind, hold by a pledge” (*qal*), “become pledged to” (*niphal*), “writhe, twist, travail” (*piel*); and *חבל* II, “act ruinously, corruptly” (s.v. “חבל II”). The three occurrences of our *חבל* are listed under the root *חבל* I.

²³⁹ *DCH*, s.v. “חבל IV.”

Other Semitic Languages

The verb **הבל** has cognates in the Jewish Aramaic **הבל**, “Wehen haben” (pael), Syriac *hbal* “empfangen” (paal), “gebären” (paal), Mandaean *HBL* (paal), and Arabic *habila* “to be pregnant.”²⁴⁰

Syntax

The verb **הבל** has transitive syntax in two occurrences:

 הבל <a> “a was pregnant/in labor with b.”

The subject, or a-element, represents the entity that is pregnant or giving birth, while the b-element designates the entity brought forth from the pregnancy or childbirth. In one usage, the syntax is intransitive:

הבל <a> “a was pregnant/in labor.”

The intransitive syntax occurs in Song 8:5 alongside a transitive usage of the same verb.

Associative Field

The verb **הבל** occurs only in poetic contexts (Song 8:5 [2x]; Ps 7:15[14]). In Song 8:5, **הבל** appears twice with a female subject: **אִמִּי** “your mother.” The transitive syntax is used first, **הַבִּלְתִּיךָ**, with the b-element being a 2ms pronoun, “you,” referring to the man or husband of the Song: **הַבִּלְתִּיךָ אִמִּי** “Your mother was pregnant/in labor with you.” The second usage in this verse is intransitive: **הַבִּלְתִּי** “She was pregnant/in labor.” Both occurrences are modified by the adverb **שָׁמָּה**, “there,” apparently referring back to a location mentioned earlier in the verse, **תַּחַת הַתְּפֹזִיחַ** “under the apple tree.” The second

²⁴⁰ Ges¹⁸, s.v. “הַבִּלְתִּי”; Drower and Machuch, 129.

occurrence of the verb *חבל* in this verse is followed by the verb *ילדתה*. The lines thus read: *שָׁמָּה חִבְּלָתָהּ אִמִּי שָׁמָּה חִבְּלָהּ יְלִדְתָּהּ* “There your mother *חִבְּלָתָהּ*, there she *חִבְּלָהּ*, she gave birth to you.” Murphy notes that it is not certain whether *חִבְּלָתָהּ* and *חִבְּלָהּ* “in v 5b refer to the mother’s conception or travail in childbirth.”²⁴¹ In Ps 7:15[14], the verb seems to refer to an early stage in childbearing, i.e., conception, as it occurs before the two parallel terms *הרה* “be pregnant” and *ילד* “bear, give birth”: *וְהָרָה עֵמָל וְהָרָה וְיִלְד וְשָׁקַר* “Behold, he will *יְהַבֵּל* iniquity, and he will be pregnant with trouble, and he will give birth to lies.” Here, *חבל* is used metaphorically, with the a-element likely being a wicked person²⁴² and the b-element being not a child but *אָוֶן* “iniquity.” The context, where *חבל* occurs alongside these other terms denoting different stages of the childbearing process—and specifically before the term *הרה*—suggests that *חבל* here likely has the sense “conceive” or “be pregnant” rather than “be in labor.” It seems plausible, then, that both occurrences of the verb in Song 8:5 similarly have the sense “to conceive.”²⁴³

²⁴¹ Roland E. Murphy, *The Song of Songs: A Commentary on the Book of Canticles or the Song of Songs*, ed. S. Dean McBride Jr., Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 191.

²⁴² The 3ms subject of the verbs in 7:13–18[12–17] is unstated. In 7:13[12], the subject seems to switch from a person (“if he [i.e., a man] does not repent”) to God (“he [i.e., God] will sharpen his sword”). In 7:14[13], the implied subject of the 3ms verbs is likely again God. However, the actions of the 3ms verbs in 7:15[14] make it clear that God is no longer the subject. Thus, most likely the implied subject is again a person, here probably a wicked person, based on the earlier reference to “the wicked” (*רָשָׁעִים*, 7:10[9]).

²⁴³ See Christopher W. Mitchell, *The Song of Songs* (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2003), 1174. BDB lists the sense “writhe, twist, hence travail” (s.v. “חבל I”); *HALOT* “go into labour with” (s.v. “חבל IV”); *DCH* lists three possible senses, “be pregnant (with), be in labour (with), give birth (to)” (s.v. “חבל III”). Garrett notes that “the Ps 7 text supports taking it to refer to conception or pregnancy rather than to childbirth” but adds, “still, the Song seems to exploit some of the ambiguity of the term here” (Duane Garrett, “Song of Songs,” in *Song of Songs, Lamentations*, by Duane Garrett and Paul R. House, Word Biblical Commentary [Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2004], 254).

Morphology

The related noun הַבֵּל occurs nine times in the OT. It is masculine and typically found in the plural, aside from one singular usage (Isa 66:7). Unlike the related verb, which may have a sense related to pregnancy or conception, the noun הַבֵּל seems to describe pains or pangs of childbirth/labor.

Other Semitic Languages

The noun הַבֵּל has cognates in Arabic (*ḥabal* “Empfängnis, Schwangerschaft”), Jewish Aramaic (הַבֵּלָא “Geburtswehen”), Syriac (*ḥēblē*), Christian Palestinian Aramaic (*HBLYN*),²⁴⁴ and Mandaean (*hbilta* “pain of a woman in labor”).²⁴⁵

Syntactic Function

הַבֵּל functions as the subject or object of a verb, as well as once as the object of a preposition. The noun is commonly indefinite but twice is made definite by a pronoun suffix.

Associative Field

Contexts of Use

הַבֵּל is found most commonly in prophetic books (7x). Its two occurrences outside of prophetic literature are in Job. While the Hebrew is slightly difficult in both

²⁴⁴ Ges¹⁸, s.v. “הַבֵּל₃.”

²⁴⁵ Drower and Machuch, 129.

texts (Job 21:17; 39:3), the usage of *חָבַל* in Job seems to be quite different from its usage in the prophets.

Syntagmatic Relations

חָבַל functions as the object of the verb *חָלַק* in Job 21:17, where God²⁴⁶ “apportions *חָבַל* in his anger” (Job 21:17). Elsewhere, *חָבַל* occurs as the subject of the verbs *בּוֹא* (Isa 66:7; Jer 22:23; Hos 13:13) and *אָחַז* (Isa 13:8; Jer 13:21; 49:24). In Isa 26:17, *חָבַל* is the object of the preposition *בְּ*, designating accompaniment, with the verb *תִּזְעַק בְּחָבְלֶיהָ*: *זַעַק* “She will cry out in/with her *חָבַלִּים*.” The subject here is the substantive adjective *הָרָה* “pregnant woman.” In Job 39:3, *חָבַלִּים*, with a masculine plural pronoun suffix, appears as the object of *שָׁלַח* (*piel*), which has *אֵילֹת* “does” as its subject: *חָבַלֵיהֶם תִּשְׁלַחנָה*: “They cast out their²⁴⁷ *חָבַלִּים*.”

The expression *כִּי־וִלְדָה* (Jer 49:24), or the expanded phrase *כִּמּוֹ אִשָּׁה לֹדָה* (Jer 13:21), occurs twice with *חָבַלִּים* + *אָחַז*. A similar expression using the verb *יָלַד* is found in Hos 13:13, where *חָבַלִּים* occurs in a construct phrase: *חָבְלֵי יוֹלְדָה יָבֹאוּ לוֹ*: “Pangs of a woman giving birth will come to him.” The only context where birth pangs are not clearly in view is Job 21:17: *כַּמָּהוּ גִרְרֵי־שָׁעִים יִדְעוּ וַיָּבֹא עֲלֵימּוֹ אִיָּהֶם חָבַלִּים*: *חָלַק בְּאַפּוֹ*: “How often does the lamp of the wicked go out, and their calamity comes upon them, [God] apportions *חָבַלִּים* in his anger?” Perhaps because of this unusual usage, some have proposed reading this as an instance of *חָבַל*, “destruction,” a noun which elsewhere occurs only in Mic 2:10.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁶ Though the subject of the 3ms verb *חָלַק* is not specified, likely “God” is implied.

²⁴⁷ Multiple Hebrew manuscripts emend the 3mp suffix (*הֶם*) to 3fp (*הֵן*), since the referent is most likely the feminine *אֵילֹת*.

²⁴⁸ *DCH*, s.v. “חָבַל”; *HALOT*, s.v. “חָבַל III.”

However, given that the context differs significantly from most other occurrences of תִּבְלָה, it is possible that תִּבְלָה here simply has a different, broader sense, not “birth pangs” specifically but “pain, pangs” more generally.

The syntagmatic combinations very clearly associate most occurrences of תִּבְלָה with the field of childbirth. In all occurrences in the prophetic books, the image of labor pangs is used in metaphors or similes, applied to a city or nation. תִּבְלָה “seize” (אחז) or “come upon” (בוא) a pregnant woman (in a figure representing the people of Israel, Isa 26:17), Zion or Jerusalem (Isa 66:7; Jer 13:21; 22:23), Damascus (Jer 49:24), Ephraim (Hos 13:13), and כָּל-יְדַיִם “all hands” and כָּל-לֵבָב אָנוּשׁ “every human heart” (Isa 13:7), that is, all people. The imagery may be used to depict fear (Isa 13:8; Jer 13:21; 49:24), suffering or judgment (Jer 22:23; Hos 13:13²⁴⁹), or a personified city (Zion) giving birth to a nation (Isa 66:7). In Job 39:3, תִּבְלָה seems to be functioning as a metonymy for one

²⁴⁹ In Hos 13:13, the metaphor is complicated. It is not clear if the תִּבְלָה are coming upon Ephraim, which would be the most natural reading of לָךְ תִּבְלָה יִלְדָה יָבֵאוּ לָךְ (“pangs of a woman bringing forth will come upon him”), or whether “Ephraim is the fetus who is affected by the birth pangs that come upon the mother” (J. Andrew Dearman, *The Book of Hosea*, NICOT [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010], 326–27). That is, are the תִּבְלָה coming “to/upon him” or to his mother “for him”? The latter option seems to be supported by the fact that Ephraim is most likely the “unwise son” described in the second half of the verse, who fails to present himself at the mouth of the cervix at the right time (הוא־בֶן לֹא תָקֵם כִּי־עָת לֹא־יִצְקֵד בְּמִשְׁבֵּר בְּנִימִים). For this option, see Dearman, 326–27; Francis I. Anderson and David Noel Freedman, *Hosea: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1980), 638; Douglas Stuart, *Hosea–Jonah*, Word Biblical Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 1988), 206. However, ל commonly occurs with the verb בוא to indicate direction, “to” or “into” (see *DCH*, s.v. “בוא”). When the syntax בוא + ל occurs elsewhere with תִּבְלָה as the subject, ל designates the one to whom the labor pangs are coming (Isa 66:7; Jer 22:23). It thus perhaps may be slightly preferable to understand Hos 13:13 in a similar way: the labor pangs are coming “to” or “upon” Ephraim, who is pictured metaphorically as a pregnant woman. Because of his iniquity and sins (13:12), pains will “overtake Ephraim like a woman in labour” (C. F. Keil, *The Twelve Minor Prophets*, trans. James Martin [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1885], 1:159; see also A. A. Macintosh, *Hosea*, ICC [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997], 543–45). תִּבְלָה here seems to be a figure representing not just “violent agony” but the “sufferings and calamities connected with the refining judgments of God, by which new life was to be born” (Keil, *Minor Prophets*, 1:159). In the second line—“he is a son that is not wise; when it is time he will not present himself at the cervical mouth”—the image shifts from the mother to the child ready to be born (William Rainey Harper, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Amos and Hosea*, ICC [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1905], 403). Ephraim, in refusing to repent of its iniquity despite coming under agonizing judgment, is here likened to a fetus that refuses to enter the opening of the womb at the time of birth, a decision that would be unwise because it would put both the mother and child in grave danger.

produced by labor pains,²⁵⁰ i.e., “fetus” or “offspring”: תְּשַׁלְּתֵנָּהּ תְּבַלְיָתָם “They release their offspring.”²⁵¹ The subject here is אֵילוֹת, “does” (39:1).

Parallel Terms

The noun תְּבַלְיָתָם is found together with צִירִים, which has a similar sense, as a double subject of the verb אָחַז (Isa 13:8). Here, the phrase צִירִים וְתְבַלְיָתָם יֶאֱחָזוּן occurs as the second of three parallel appositional phrases:

וְנִבְהָלוּ “And they will be dismayed;
 צִירִים וְתְבַלְיָתָם יֶאֱחָזוּן pangs and תְּבַלְיָתָם will seize [them],
 כַּיּוֹלְדָה יֶחֱלֶגֶן like a woman bringing forth they will writhe in pain.”

These parallel lines are mutually amplifying, working together to build a vivid picture of a woman suddenly seized by severe labor pains and writhing in pain, representative of the fearful trembling, anguish, and agony that will overcome all people when the day of Yahweh comes (13:6). A similar picture is found in Jer 49:24, where תְּבַלְיָתָם is found in combination with צָרָה, “distress”:

רָפְתָה דָּמְשֶׁק הִפְנִתָה לְנוֹס “Damascus has become weak; she turned to flee,
 וְרָטְטוּ הַתְּזִיקָה and panic took hold of her;
 צָרָה וְתְבַלְיָתָם אֶחָזְתָה כַּיּוֹלְדָה distress and תְּבַלְיָתָם seized her like a woman giving birth.”

In Jer 22:23, the noun חֵיל is found in apposition to תְּבַלְיָתָם:

מַה־יִנְחַתְּ בְּבֵאֵלָהּ תְּבַלְיָתָם “How you will be pitied when תְּבַלְיָתָם come to you,
 חֵיל כַּיּוֹלְדָה writhing like a woman bringing forth.”

²⁵⁰ BDB, s.v. “תְּבַלְיָתָם”; DCH, s.v. “תְּבַלְיָתָם”; Scharbert, *Schmerz*, 19.

²⁵¹ See ESV, “are delivered of their young”; NJPS, “deliver their young”; NET, “they bring forth the offspring they have carried”; NKJV, “they deliver their offspring”; “they are delivered of their fetus” (John E. Hartley, *The Book of Job*, NICOT [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988], 505); “they cast out their offspring” (Hakham, *Job*, 399); DCH, s.v. “שִׁלָּה I.” Others read תְּבַלְיָתָם in its usual sense, “labor pains,” and interpret the piel verb תְּשַׁלְּתֵנָּהּ in the sense “to be rid of” (*HALOT*, s.v. “שִׁלָּה”), so NASB “they get rid of their labor pains”; NIV “their labor pains are ended” (see also KJV, which takes שִׁלָּה in a similar sense but offers an unusual rendering of תְּבַלְיָתָם: “they cast out their sorrows”).

As their usage elsewhere suggests, the nouns *צירים* and *חיל* seem to be near synonyms of *חבלים* in these contexts. The noun *צרה* “distress,” by contrast, likely does not share the same sense as *חבל* but is here co-referential, describing the same situation from a slightly different angle.

Elsewhere, the noun *חבל* is found alongside expressions using the verb *חיל*, as in Isa 66:7:

בְּטָרַם תְּחִיל יִלְדָּה “Before she writhed in anguish (in labor), she gave birth;
בְּטָרַם יָבֹוא חֶבֶל לָהּ וְהִמְלִיטָה זָכָר before *חבל* came to her, she delivered a son.”

The parallel between *בְּטָרַם תְּחִיל* and *בְּטָרַם יָבֹוא חֶבֶל לָהּ* seems to be an instance of static semantic parallelism, as the expressions seem to be essentially synonymous, though it is possible that *יָבֹוא חֶבֶל לָהּ* heightens or presents a more concrete picture than *תְּחִיל*.²⁵²

Post-Biblical Hebrew

The noun *חבל* occurs at least six times in the DSS. In all uses, the noun is plural. It appears three times, as noted above, with the verb *נמרץ* in the phrase “painful labor” or “intensive tribulation” (1QH^a 11:8, 11, 12). It is also used in the same context as the object of the preposition *בְּ* modifying the hiphil verb *הצרה*, “suffer distress (in childbirth), suffer labour pains” (1QH^a 11:9).²⁵³ In 1QH^a 17:6, also discussed above, *חבל* is the object of *מִן*: “From ruin to devastation, and from pain to affliction, and from tribulations [חבלים] 7 to breakers, my

²⁵² See also the occurrence of *חבלים* alongside the verb *חיל* in Isa 26:17:
כְּמוֹ הָרָה תִקְרִיב לֵלְדֹת “Like a woman that draws near to giving birth,
תְּחִיל תִּזְעַק בְּחַבְלֶיהָ she writhes; she cries out with her *חבלים*.”

²⁵³ *DCH*, s.v. “צרה I.”

soul contemplates your wonders.”²⁵⁴ In an expression reminiscent of some of its biblical uses, *חֶבֶל* is also found once as the implied subject of *אָחַז* “to seize,” followed by the phrase *כְּצִירֵי יוֹלְדָה* “like the pangs of a woman giving birth” (1QH^a 13:30).

Semantic Conclusions

In most occurrences, the noun *חֶבֶל* seems to have the sense “labor pangs.” The noun is frequently found in the prophets in contexts with multiple other terms for childbirth or labor pangs. The vivid, concrete image of a woman being seized by her labor pangs is used to depict people or cities reacting to distressing news, and probably aspects of both physical and mental pain are in view. The usage in Job is somewhat different than the usage in the prophets. In Job 39:3, as noted above, the noun appears to be used as a metonymy for “offspring.” Here, while the focus is not on the pain of labor, the association with childbirth is still clear from the context. In Job 21:17, however, there is no mention of childbirth, and it is possible that the noun could have a broader sense, such as “pain” or “anguish.”

²⁵⁴ Charlesworth et al., *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, 5A:173; Martínez and Tigchelaar translate *חֶבֶל* “pangs” rather than “tribulations” (“from ruin to annihilation, from sickness to disease, from pangs 7 to labours, my soul reflects on your wonders,” 182).

צִיר

צִיר

Morphology

The noun צִיר is used five times in the OT. All occurrences are in the plural. It has cognates in Jewish Aramaic (צִירְתָּא “anxiety”) and Arabic (*dair* “damage, harm”).²⁵⁵

Syntactic Function

צִיר functions as the subject of a verb four times. Once, it occurs in a construct phrase that is the object of a preposition. The noun is indefinite three times and definite twice, with definiteness indicated by a pronominal suffix.

Associative Field

Contexts of Use

The noun צִיר is used in poetic and prose contexts. It occurs primarily in prophetic poetry but is also found in narrative texts.

Syntagmatic Relations

צִיר is used as the subject of the verbs הפך (niph'al, 1 Sam 4:19; Dan 10:16) and אחז (Isa 13:8; 21:3). צִיר also occurs as the object of the preposition כִּי, modifying the verb אחז which also has צִיר as its subject (Isa 21:3). Here, it is in construct with יולֶדֶה: יִלְדוּנִי יִלְדֶה צִירִים אֶחָזְנִי: יִלְדֶה “כְּצִירֵי יִלְדֶה צִירִים seized me like צִירִים of one giving birth.” The construct phrase clearly

²⁵⁵ HALOT, s.v. “צִיר III.”

associates צירים with the process of childbirth. Like the other terms examined in this chapter, the noun ציר is frequently used in metaphors and similes. In Isa 21:3, the speaker is Isaiah, describing his reaction to a terrifying vision of destruction by picturing himself as a woman seized by the sudden pangs of labor.

The noun ציר is used once in a narrative about childbirth. In 1 Sam 4:19, צירים, with a 3fs suffix referring to the wife of Phineas, occurs as the subject of הפך (niph'al, “turn, come”): upon hearing the news that the ark had been captured and her father-in-law and husband had died, the pregnant wife of Phineas “bowed down and she gave birth, for her צירים came upon her” (ותקבע ותלד כי־נהפכו עליה צריה). The explanatory clause with כי connects צירים with childbirth (ילד), suggesting that the coming of her צירים resulted in her giving birth.

In Dan 10:16, the one experiencing צירים is Daniel: במראה נהפכו צירי עלי “By the vision, my צירים have come upon me.” The sense “labor pangs” perhaps is being used metaphorically, as in Isa 21:3. However, given the presence of the pronominal suffix, and the fact that there is no other reference in the context to birth, it is possible that ציר here has a more general sense, “pangs” or “pains” unrelated to childbirth.²⁵⁶ As in Isa 21:3, the experience of צירים by Daniel is a response to witnessing a terrifying vision.

²⁵⁶ BDB lists the sense “pang” for ציר, with a note regarding the occurrence in Dan 10:16, “in gen., of physical effects of mental distress” (s.v. “ציר IV”). The presence of the pronominal suffix, specifying that the צירים belong specifically to Daniel, is unusual for a male; if the sense were “labor pangs,” one might expect Daniel to simply say נהפכו צירים עלי “labor pangs have turned/come upon me,” as in other usages of צירים and semantically related nouns (e.g., Isa 21:3; Mic 4:9), rather than “my labor pangs have come upon me.”

Parallel Terms

As noted in the discussion of other terms above, the noun צירים occurs alongside מלאו מתני מלואו as the subject of אחז (Isa 13:8) and is elsewhere parallel with the phrase תלתלה “my loins were filled with pangs” (21:3). In 1 Sam 4:19, the phrase נהפכו עליה צריה occurs in context with the verbs פרע “bow down, crouch,” probably indicating the posture of giving birth, and ילד “give birth.” In the other prose context, Dan 10:16, the expression נהפכו צירי עלי is followed by ולא עצרתי קח “and I retain no strength,” suggesting a connection between the coming of pains/pangs and the loss of strength.

Post-Biblical Hebrew

ציר occurs three times in post-biblical Hebrew, in contexts that have been noted above. It occurs twice as the subject of הפך (niph'al) (1QH^a 11:7, 11). In 1QH^a 13:30, צירים occurs in construct with חבלים: חבלים זלעופות: חבלים, as the object of the preposition כ modifying יולדה, as the object of the preposition כ modifying יולדה “Resentment seizes me, and pangs, like the צירים of a woman giving birth.” In these post-biblical texts, the term צירים occurs with the same verbs (הפך; אחז) as it does in the OT texts, in similar syntagms (צירי יולדה), and alongside the same terms (תבלים). The similarities between these passages and some of the biblical texts using צירים indicates that צירים continued to be used in a similar manner in post-biblical Hebrew.

Semantic Conclusions

ציר, or צירים, appears to have the sense “labor pangs” in most of its occurrences. It is possible that the noun has the broader sense “pains” or “pangs” in Dan 10:16, the one context where other terms for childbirth or labor pangs are not found. However, it here

occurs with the same verb (הפך, niph'al) as in 1 Sam 4:19, where ציריִם has the sense “labor pangs” and is used of a woman giving birth after her ציריִם come upon her. Thus, perhaps it is better to understand Dan 10:16 as a different metaphorical application of the sense “labor pangs” rather than as employing a distinct sense.

Relations Between the Terms

Verbs

As noted above, it is not entirely clear whether הִיל in the qal has multiple senses (“to have labor pains,” “to tremble,” “to writhe/be in anguish”) or if these are simply extended uses of a primary sense, such as, perhaps “to be in anguish” or “to writhe in pain (in labor).” In any case, in comparison to the verb כָּאַב, the verb הִיל seems to have a narrower sense, designating a specific type of pain. Perhaps it would be appropriate to describe הִיל as a hyponym of the more general term כָּאַב. There seems to be less semantic overlap between the terms הִיל and עִצַּב; both can describe pain, but the types of pain indicated by the sense of these verbs is quite different. These verbs may be contiguous with one another. Contiguous relations are “those existing between words that, while sharing some semantic features, *cannot* ever be interchanged”²⁵⁷ because they “do not overlap in sense.”²⁵⁸ While הִיל and עִצַּב have some shared features, in the fact that their senses are both related to pain, they do not directly overlap in sense and there are

²⁵⁷ Silva, *Biblical Words*, 126.

²⁵⁸ Peter Cotterell and Max Turner, *Linguistics and Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 157. For example, there is clearly a relation of similarity between the senses of the terms “walk” and “run.” However, these terms are probably not to be treated as proper synonyms, since they cannot accurately be interchanged in any context.

probably no contexts in which they would be interchangeable. *הָיִל* seems to have a meaning that is more concrete, vivid, or intense than either *עָצַב* or *פָּאַב*, communicating not just “be in pain” or “cause pain/grief” but “to writhe in pain/anguish.” In many occurrences, *הָיִל* also seems to have a nuance of fear that is not present in any of the other terms examined in this study.

While the verbs *הָיִל*, *עָצַב*, and *פָּאַב* clearly have some relation semantically, it is not as clear what relation these verbs have with the verb *הָבֵל*, which only occurs three times in the OT and appears to have the senses “to conceive/be pregnant,” “to be in labor.” While there is clearly some overlap between *הָיִל* and *הָבֵל*, in that both can have senses related to being in labor, the terms do not seem to be synonymous.²⁵⁹ Because its sense seems to be related to pregnancy or childbirth more generally—rather than specifically designating the *pain* of childbirth—it is not clear whether *הָבֵל* actually belongs in the semantic domain of pain. In any case, *הָבֵל* appears to have much less semantic overlap with the verbs *פָּאַב* or *עָצַב* than *הָיִל* does.

Nouns

The noun *הָיִל* seems to have a narrower range of meaning than the verb *הָיִל*. The study above suggests that the nouns *הָיִל*, *צִיר*, and *הָבֵל* have significant overlap semantically. A strict view of synonymy holds that “only those words can be described as synonymous which can replace each other in any given context, without the slightest alteration either in cognitive or emotive import.”²⁶⁰ Though absolute synonymy is fairly

²⁵⁹ As discussed below, however, the nouns from these roots seem to be closely related semantically.

²⁶⁰ Stephen Ullmann, *Principles of Semantics* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1957), 108–9.

rare, it seems plausible to consider הָיִל, צִיר, and תְּהַבֵּל as at least very near synonyms.²⁶¹ They are used in similar contexts and with similar verbs and expressions, and they are often found alongside one another, whether in parallel lines or in apposition to one another.²⁶² There are certain contexts where תְּהַבֵּל and צִיר may have a more broad sense, “pang” or “anguish,” rather than specifically “labor pang” (Job 21:17; Dan 10:16); in these texts, there is no other language explicitly related to childbearing. However, in many contexts, it seems plausible that the nouns הָיִל, צִיר, and תְּהַבֵּל could replace one another with little or no alteration in the cognitive or emotive import.

The noun תְּהַלְהֵלָה, while certainly overlapping in many ways with these other nouns, may be slightly less closely related semantically. As noted above, תְּהַלְהֵלָה does not occur as frequently with other terms for childbearing as these other terms do; תְּהַלְהֵלָה never occurs with a modifying phrase such as כִּי־יֵלְדָה “like a woman giving birth” that would obviously associate it with the pain of labor. Thus, it seems plausible that תְּהַלְהֵלָה may have the sense “pain/anguish” more broadly; possibly the sense is specifically “labor pain/pang” in Isa 21:3, where it occurs in context with צִיר, though a broad sense “anguish/pain” would also fit in this context. Interestingly, there is no biblical author that uses all four of these nouns. While frequently employing the verb הָיִל, Isaiah does not use the noun הָיִל and only uses the noun תְּהַלְהֵלָה once. Isaiah seems to prefer the nouns תְּהַבֵּל (3x) and צִיר (3x) to describe anguish/labor pains. Jeremiah makes use of הָיִל (3x) and תְּהַבֵּל (3x) but never צִיר or תְּהַלְהֵלָה.

²⁶¹ Of course, it is possible that there are other contexts in which they are not interchangeable, or there is some difference in nuance that is missed by modern readers. However, in the materials available to us, it seems that these terms are essentially synonyms in most contexts.

²⁶² הָיִל is used in apposition to תְּהַבֵּלִים (Jer 22:23). Similarly, תְּהַבֵּלִים appears alongside צִירִים (Isa 13:8), again suggesting a similarity and likely some overlap in meaning.

It remains to be considered how the nouns examined in this chapter relate to those examined in Chapter 2. The nouns **כָּאֵב** and **מְכָאוֹב**, as noted above, have the very broad meaning “pain.” **חִיל**, **צִיר**, and **חֲבָל**, by contrast, are more narrow terms, often designating a more specific and seemingly more severe or acute form of pain. The nouns **חִיל**, **צִיר**, and **חֲבָל** seem to depict pain as something active and dynamic: **מְכָאוֹב** is something that can be seen (**רָאָה**), known (**יָדַע**), recounted (**סָפַר**, **piel**), whereas **חִיל**, **צִיר**, and **חֲבָל** are said to seize (**אָחַז**), take hold of (**חִזַּק**, **hiph**), or come upon (**בּוֹא**; **הִפָּךְ**, **niph**) a person. The semantic contribution of **חִיל**, **צִיר**, and **חֲבָל** thus seems to be more vivid and concrete than the semantic contribution of the nouns **מְכָאוֹב** and **כָּאֵב**. Perhaps the nouns **חִיל**, **חֲלָחְלָה**, **צִיר**, and **חֲבָל** are hyponyms of **כָּאֵב** and **מְכָאוֹב**, though the vividness and intensity communicated with **חִיל**, **חֲלָחְלָה**, **צִיר**, and **חֲבָל** would be lost if the more general terms **כָּאֵב** and **מְכָאוֹב** were used in their place.

The semantic relation between these terms for labor pangs/anguish and the nouns from the root **עצב** is not as clear. It does not seem that there would be any context in which one of the nouns from the root **עצב** could be interchanged with **חִיל**, **חֲלָחְלָה**, **צִיר**, or **חֲבָל**, or vice versa. The nouns **חִיל**, **צִיר**, or **חֲבָל** specifically have a sense related to pain or pangs of labor, while nouns from the root **עצב** never have this sense, though it is possible that these nouns, having the sense “pain” or “toil,” can be used to refer to birth pains (e.g., perhaps Gen 3:16; 1 Chron 4:9). While **חִיל**, **חֲלָחְלָה**, **צִיר**, or **חֲבָל** may have some semantic relation to **עֲצָב**, **עֲצָבָה**, **עֲצָב**, **עֲצָבוֹן**, and **מִעֲצָבָה**, in that both sets of terms can have senses related to pain, their meanings are nevertheless quite distinct. These two sets of nouns describe very different types of pain. They probably could not be interchanged in any contexts, so they likely should not be viewed as synonymous. It is probably best to

understand them as contiguous. The nouns חַיִּל, חֲלָהָה, צִיר, or חֲבָל convey the experience of pain in a way that is more concrete, visceral, and vivid than עֲצָב, עֲצָבָת, עֲצָב, עֲצָבוֹן, or מֵעֲצָבָה.

Altering VanGemerer's Semantic Domain

Having examined the terms in this semantic domain in depth and briefly considered the relations between them, it remains to be asked whether the lexical study above can provide any insight as to where the boundaries of the semantic field should be drawn. One question that must be considered is whether all of the lexemes included in VanGemerer's arrangement of the terms actually belong in the semantic domain of "pain, pangs." The verb מָרַץ, for example, is found in VanGemerer's semantic domain but not included in Josef Scharbert's analysis of words for pain, mentioned above.²⁶³ It is somewhat difficult to know the exact sense of this term since it only occurs four times in the OT. The fact that its semitic cognates have the sense "to be sick" suggests that perhaps מָרַץ has the sense "to be sickening" rather than "to be painful." However, based on the analysis above, it seems that the verb is close enough in meaning to other terms in VanGemerer's semantic field to justify its inclusion.

One term that could perhaps be removed is the verb חָבַל, which seems to have the sense "to be pregnant" and perhaps "to be in labor." Because it occurs so infrequently, it is difficult to be certain what nuance the verb has and whether it actually conveys the aspect of "pain" or "pangs" of labor. In the only occurrences of חָבַל where it might have the sense "to be in labor" (Song 8:5 [2x]), the focus seems to be more on the event of

²⁶³ Scharbert, *Schmerz*, 16–73.

childbirth rather than specifically the pain of childbirth; at the very least, as noted above, the element of “pain” is not as obvious as it would be with a term such as *הייל*. Thus, while a lack of evidence prevents certainty, it seems that it may be appropriate to omit *חבל* from the semantic domain of “pain.”

Another term whose inclusion here is questionable is the noun *עצבון*. The discussion above has suggested that *עצבון* primarily has the sense “toil” or, in light of the fact that it seems to have a negative nuance, perhaps “painful toil.” If the semantic field contains only terms that specifically have the sense “pain” or “pangs,” then probably *עצבון* should be omitted. If terms that designate something that causes pain, or painful experiences, are included in the lexical domain of “pain, pangs,” then *עצבון* can perhaps be included. While not directly describing “pain,” the term *עצבון* may describe something that causes pain, or a painful experience; however, it likely overlaps more with terms from a different domain, such as that of “labor, trouble, toil”²⁶⁴ or “toil.”²⁶⁵

As noted above, the verb *עצב* also differs in meaning from some of the other terms included in this semantic domain, such as *הייל* and even sometimes *כאב*, as *עצב* often seems to signify grief specifically, rather pain more broadly or the physical anguish of childbirth. While there is probably not sufficient reason to remove *עצב* from the semantic field of “pain, pangs,” since it can be used with the sense “to feel pain” or “to cause pain,” the verb, in most of its occurrences, would likely have a closer semantic relation

²⁶⁴ VanGemenen, 5:115.

²⁶⁵ VanGemenen, 5:196.

with terms in another field, such as VanGemerren's "grief, distress, anguish,"²⁶⁶ where *עצב* also appears.

Another question that must be considered is whether there are terms that should be added to this semantic field. As noted above, one of the main changes that could be made to VanGemerren's semantic domain of "pain, pangs" is the addition of the noun *ציר*. Since the nouns *היל* and *הקל* are included, which, as discussed, seem to be essentially synonymous with *ציר*, it seems that *ציר* should be included in the semantic domain. A second change that could be considered, also noted above, is the inclusion of the nouns *תלקלה* and the hapax *עצב/עצב*. The study of *תלקלה* demonstrated that while it may have a broader sense than *היל*, this term likely has some overlap in meaning with the related noun *היל* as well as the nouns *ציר* and *הקל*, suggesting that it, too, should be added to the semantic domain. The term *עצב/עצב*, on the other hand, was shown to likely have the sense "laborer," and thus VanGemerren is perhaps justified in omitting this noun from the semantic field.

Scharbert, in his lexical analysis, includes multiple terms that are not found in *NIDOTTE*'s semantic domain, including *חלה*, *דוה*, *כעס*, *יגה*, *אבל*, *קדר*, *עגם*, *ספד*, *נחם*, and *שיח*. While these terms are grouped into different sub-categories,²⁶⁷ these categories are nevertheless all included within the boundaries of words for pain by Scharbert. Though there is no doubt semantic overlap between these terms and some of those in

²⁶⁶ VanGemerren, 5:95.

²⁶⁷ *עצב*, *כעס*, and *יגה* are considered under the category *Schmerz durch Krankung und Verletzung* (Pain from Insult and Injury), *חלה*, *דוה*, and *כאב* under *Schmerz in Krankheit und hoffnungsloser Lage* (Pain in Sickness and a Hopeless Situation), *אבל*, *קדר*, *עגם*, and *ספד* under *Trauer* (Mourning), under *Trost*, *Reueschmerz* und *Mitleid* (Grief, Pain of Remorse, and Compassion), and *שיח* under *Schmerzliches Grübeln* (Painful Worrying).

VanGemerén's presentation, it is questionable whether any of the additional terms found in Scharbert's presentation should be added to VanGemerén's list. The words חלה and דוה seem to denote sickness rather than specifically "pain." The term כעס ("to be vexed, angry") does not seem to be particularly closely related in meaning to עצב or any of the other terms in VanGemerén's domain; while כעס could perhaps be used to describe the same referents as might be described with עצב, its sense is not related to pain directly and thus it probably should not be included in the domain of "pain, pangs." Similarly, the terms אבל, קדר, עגם, ספד, נחם, and שיה do not seem to be terms for "pain" but rather designate various responses to pain, such as mourning, grief, complaint, or lament. The word יגה ("to grieve, be grieved"), on the other hand, seems to have more similarities to the verb עצב ("to be in pain, be grieved"), at least in certain contexts. However, its sense is perhaps narrower than עצב and thus it probably fits better in the semantic field of "grief, distress, anguish" than "pain, pangs."

Other terms that neither Scharbert nor VanGemerén include could also be considered. The word צרה ("distress") occurs twice alongside the noun חיל and once alongside חבלים, suggesting perhaps צרה has at least some semantic overlap with these terms in certain contexts. A brief examination of its usage suggests that צרה seems to have a wider range of meaning and more abstract sense than either חיל or חבל, which perhaps places it in closer connection to terms like עני ("affliction") or עמל ("trouble"). Such terms can be used to describe experiences that might be considered painful either emotionally or physically, but they do not have the sense "pain." Thus, at first glance, there is probably not enough evidence to include any of these terms in the semantic

domain “pain, pangs,” though an in-depth study of such terms would be necessary to determine their ranges of meaning and relation to this semantic domain.

In addition to these abstract terms for distress or affliction, biblical Hebrew contains various concrete terms that can be used to describe physically painful experiences, such as מַכָּה, פְּצַע, שָׂרָר, חֲבוּרָה, חֶלֶל, and מַחֵץ. However, while these words certainly are closely adjacent semantically to the domain of “pain,” they do not have the general sense “pain” or “pangs” but more narrowly describe specific instances of physical harm, such as a wound or bruise. They are thus best left excluded from this semantic domain. Moreover, if such terms describing specific causes of pain do not belong in the semantic field, it is also questionable whether עֲצָבוֹן should in fact be included in this semantic field.

Chapter 4

An Examination of Terms for Pain in Genesis 3

To consider how the lexical study of Hebrew words for pain above can help us understand passages where these terms are used, this chapter will look at Genesis 3:16–17, where the terms עָצַב and עֲצָבוֹן (2x) occur, with a specific focus on the debate regarding the meaning of these terms in Gen 3:16.²⁶⁸ The text of Gen 3:16–17 reads:

אֶל־הָאִשָּׁה אָמַר	To the woman he said,
הֲרֵבָה אֲרַבְּהָ עֲצָבוֹנָהּ וְהִרְבִּיהָ	(a) “I will surely multiply your עֲצָבוֹן and your conception,
בְּעֲצָב תֵּלְדֵי בָנִים	(b) in עֲצָב you will bring forth children. ²⁶⁹
וְאֶל־אִישָׁהּ תִּשְׁוָקֶתָּהּ	(c) And for your husband will be your longing,
וְהוּא יִמְשַׁלְּכָהּ: ֵס	(d) and he will have dominion over you.”
וּלְאָדָם אָמַר	And to Adam he said,
כִּי־שָׁמַעְתָּ לְקוֹל אִשְׁתְּךָ	“Because you have listened to the voice of your wife,
וְתָאֲכַל מִן־הָעֵץ	and you have eaten from the tree
אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתִיךָ לֵאמֹר	of which I commanded you, saying,
לֹא תֹאכַל מִמֶּנּוּ	‘Do not eat from it,’
אָרוּרָה הָאֲדָמָה בְּעִבּוּרְךָ	cursed is the ground because of you;
בְּעֲצָבוֹן תֹּאכְלֶנָּה כָּל יְמֵי חַיֶּיךָ:	in עֲצָבוֹן you will eat of it all the days of your life.”

²⁶⁸ The focus of this chapter will be on lexical issues as they relate to Gen 3:16. Naturally, there are several questions regarding this passage that are beyond the current scope of this study, including: how to interpret the highly debated second half of Gen 3:16 (וְאֶל־אִישָׁהּ תִּשְׁוָקֶתָּהּ וְהוּא יִמְשַׁלְּכָהּ); how to understand the verb רבה (i.e., is this signaling the introduction of something that was not there before, or an intensification of something that was already present?); and how to interpret the decrees of Gen 3:16, since the language of “curse” (found in 3:15, 17) is not explicitly used here (and the related question of whether these statements are prescriptive or descriptive). A more robust examination of this verse in the history of interpretation would also be beneficial but is ultimately outside the scope of this project. Additionally, due to the limitations of this project, a number of interpretive issues related to the larger literary context and the historical background of this text are not addressed in-depth here.

²⁶⁹ The Samaritan Pentateuch uses the term עֲצָבוֹן twice in this verse: in addition to אֲרַבְּהָ עֲצָבוֹנָהּ in the first line, SP has the noun עֲצָבוֹן as the object of בְּ in the following line, in place of the MT עָצַב.

I will begin by discussing and evaluating three proposals regarding the meaning of these terms in Gen 3:16, with particular attention to their use of lexical evidence, before moving to propose an alternative explanation.²⁷⁰

Interpretations of עֵצָבוֹן and עֵצָב in Genesis 3:16

While a number of other proposals have been made,²⁷¹ most interpreters understand עֵצָב and עֵצָבוֹן in Gen 3:16 as describing one of three things: the physical pain of childbirth, emotional pain, or physical toil.

Physical Pain of Childbirth

A majority of modern English Bible translations seem to interpret עֵצָבוֹן and עֵצָב in Gen 3:16 as describing the physical pains of childbirth or childbearing. The ESV, for example, reads: “I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring

²⁷⁰ I am grateful in this discussion for the work of Christopher Huntley (“‘Pain in Childbearing’? Seeing Grief Associated with Parenthood in Genesis 3.16a as Opposed to Physical Pain in the Process of Giving Birth” [master’s thesis, Covenant Theological Seminary, 2022]), which alerted me to many of the resources with which I will interact below. His work aligns most with the emotional interpretation; for interaction with this approach, see below.

²⁷¹ Other proposals that have been offered include that Gen 3:16 is related to menstruation (Theresa Sanders, *Approaching Eden: Adam and Eve in Popular Culture* [Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009], 113–27) and that it decrees a longer period of gestation (Tzvi Novick, “Pain and Production in Eden: Some Philological Reflections on Genesis iii 16,” *Vetus Testamentum* 58, no. 2 [2008]: 235–44). Others suggest that the curse encompasses not simply pregnancy or childbirth but the whole process of parenthood. James Montgomery Boice, for example, posits that the words of Gen 3:16 imply that “the pain associated with children’s births will continue in other ways throughout the mother’s (and father’s) life as these who are now born in sin dishonor their parents and experience in their own lives the consequences of their disobedience” (James Montgomery Boice, *Genesis: An Expositional Commentary*, vol. 1, *Genesis 1:1–11:32* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982], 178). A similar idea is also mentioned by Iain Provan, whose view is discussed below (“Pain in Childbirth? Further Thoughts on ‘An Attractive Fragment’ [1 Chronicles 4:9–10],” in *Let Us Go Up to Zion: Essays in Honour of H. G. M. Williamson on the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. Iain Provan and Mark J. Boda [Leiden: Brill, 2012], 293), and Tremper Longman (*Genesis, The Story of God Bible Commentary* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016], 67).

forth children.”²⁷² In addition to these translations, numerous commentators have interpreted עֲצָבוֹן and עֲצָב here as describing physical childbirth pain. Some have proposed that this line of interpretation has been inherited from the 4th-century theologian Chrysostom, who reads these two lines as God’s sentencing the woman to “painful labor” in childbirth.²⁷³ Chrysostom translates, “I will greatly aggravate the pain of your labor, in pain you will bear children.”²⁷⁴ “Through the distress and the pain of each birth,” writes Chrysostom, the woman will have a reminder of the magnitude of her sin and disobedience.²⁷⁵ More recent commentators who interpret along these lines include

²⁷² See also NIV, NASB (“your pain in childbirth”), NET (“your labor pains”), NJPS, RSV, and NRSVue (“pangs in childbirth”) for similar renderings.

²⁷³ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis 1–17*, trans. Robert C. Hill, FOTC 74 (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1986), 17.30.238. See discussion in Provan, “Pain,” 289.

²⁷⁴ Chrysostom, 17.30.238.

²⁷⁵ Chrysostom, 17.31.238.

Skinner,²⁷⁶ Von Rad,²⁷⁷ Davidson,²⁷⁸ Westermann,²⁷⁹ Vawter,²⁸⁰ Wenham,²⁸¹ Sarna,²⁸² Hamilton,²⁸³ Mathews,²⁸⁴ Hartley,²⁸⁵ Waltke,²⁸⁶ Longman,²⁸⁷ and Steinmann.²⁸⁸

Rather than reading עֲצָבוֹן and הֵרֹן as independent ideas, proponents of this interpretation generally take עֲצָבוֹן וְהֵרֹן as a hendiadys. It is assumed that the pair are joined together to express a single idea, usually leading to a translation such as “I will surely multiply the pain associated with your childbearing.” While some scholars are

²⁷⁶ John Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis*, 2nd ed., ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1930), 82. Skinner translates “the pain of thy conception” but seems to understand this as a description of “the pains of childbirth.”

²⁷⁷ Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972), 93. Von Rad mentions “hardships of pregnancy” and “pains at birth.”

²⁷⁸ Robert Davidson, *Genesis 1–11*, The Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 44.

²⁷⁹ Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1–11: A Commentary*, trans. John J. Scullion (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1974), 261–62. Westermann notes that Gen 3:16, “in two parallel sentences, assigns to the woman pain in bearing children and in giving birth” (261).

²⁸⁰ Bruce Vawter, *On Genesis: A New Reading* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1977), 84.

²⁸¹ Gordon Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, Word Biblical Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 81.

²⁸² Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 27–28.

²⁸³ Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 200. Hamilton notes that the woman “will give birth in agony. At the point in her life when a woman experiences her highest sense of self-fulfillment (according to OT emphases), she will have some physical anguish.”

²⁸⁴ Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, NAC (Nashville: B&H Publishers, 1996), 249–50. Mathews offers the translation “I will greatly increase your painful labor and your conception; in painful labor you will bear sons” and notes that Eve’s “penalty stresses the ‘painful labor’ she must endure in childbirth” (249).

²⁸⁵ John E. Hartley, *Genesis*, NIBC (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2000), 69.

²⁸⁶ Bruce K. Waltke and Cathi J. Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 94.

²⁸⁷ Longman, 67.

²⁸⁸ Andrew Steinmann, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019), 71.

more tentative in asserting a hendiadys,²⁸⁹ many simply assume its presence, offering little to no discussion, explanation, or justification for this reading. Westermann, for example, simply writes, “the construction ‘I will greatly multiply your pain and your childbearing’ is a typical hendiadys; it means: the pains that childbearing will bring you.”²⁹⁰

While this interpretation of Gen 3:16 as describing the physical pains of childbirth seems to be the most prominent and widely held view, various problems have been noted with it, which leads us to a second approach.

Emotional/Psychological Pain

An alternative proposal that has gained some traction is that Gen 3:16 describes not the physical pain of childbirth but emotional or psychological suffering. In what follows, I will begin by discussing some difficulties with the traditional view that are commonly noted by proponents of an emotional view, then examine and evaluate the arguments made in support of the emotional interpretation.

Critique of Traditional View

Those who support an emotional interpretation of Gen 3:16 critique the traditional physical birth pain view at multiple points. First, they argue that עֲצָבָה and עֲצָבוֹן, or the root עֲצָב more generally, are not elsewhere used of childbirth pain or of physical pain. Provan, for example, notes that “a quick survey of the literature” reveals that there are no other

²⁸⁹ Wenham, for example, writes, “‘Your pains and your pregnancies’ is probably hendiadys for ‘your pains of pregnancy’” (81).

²⁹⁰ Westermann, 262.

occasions where the “root עִצַּב is used to refer to labour-pains.”²⁹¹ He goes on to point out that “conversely, there is a well-established vocabulary which is routinely used to refer to such realities: צָרַר, חָבַל, and חוּל.”²⁹²

A second argument made against reading this verse as a reference to physical birth pains is that the term הָרֹן in the first line of Gen 3:16 (הַרְבָּה אֶרְבָּה עֲצֻבוֹנָה וְהָרֹנָה) likely means not “childbirth” but “conception.”²⁹³ Provan notes that this term “is of very questionable connection to the birthing of children.”²⁹⁴ The particular form הָרֹן occurs only here in the OT. It is likely a by-form of the noun הָרִיוֹן, which occurs only twice in the OT and seems to mean “conception” or “pregnancy” (Ruth 4:13; Hos 9:11). Both nouns appear to be related to the verb הָרָה, “to conceive, to be pregnant.”²⁹⁵

²⁹¹ Provan, “Pain,” 288.

²⁹² Provan, “Pain,” 288. It is interesting that Provan lists the root צָרַר here rather than צִיר. The verb צָרַר does occur twice of a woman “in distress,” plausibly referring to a woman giving birth (Jer 48:41; 49:22). Perhaps Provan has in mind צִיר, though it is not generally thought that there is a connection between this noun and the root צָרַר.

²⁹³ Provan, “Pain,” 292; Christine Curley and Brian Peterson, “Eve’s Curse Revisited: An Increase of ‘Sorrowful Conceptions,’” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 26, no. 2 (2016): 161.

²⁹⁴ Provan, “Pain,” 292.

²⁹⁵ *DCH*, s.v. “הרה”; *HALOT*, s.v. “הרה.” David Tsumura has suggested that the root of הָרֹן is a geminate verb הָרַר, a root otherwise unattested in Hebrew, because the spelling of the noun “does not really support the root *hry under a normal situation” (David T. Tsumura, “A Note on הָרֹן [Gen 3,16],” *Biblica* 75, no. 3 [1994]: 399). Tsumura proposes that “the meaning of [the] Hebrew root *hrr...might be better explained in the light of Akkadian *arāru* ‘to tremble’” (Tsumura, “A Note on הָרֹן,” 400). He concludes that “the Hebrew הרנך probably means ‘your trembling’” and that “the phrase עֲצֻבוֹנָה וְהָרֹנָה thus constitutes a hendiadys, ‘your pain and trembling,’ i.e. ‘your trembling pain,’ which he suggests is related to the woman’s “unique role in childbirth” (Tsumura, “A Note on הָרֹן,” 400; see Tsumura, “A Note on הָרֹן,” 399, for a brief discussion of other comparative proposals regarding this term). However, there is some uncertainty about the etymology and meaning of the proposed Akkadian cognate. Tsumura writes that “while the Akkadian form, *arāru*, can be traced to several Semitic roots, such as *’rr*, *wrr*, and *hrr*, the meanings which *CAD*...suggests for *arāru* B, ‘to fear,’ ‘to become agitated, panic-stricken’...seem to fit in the present context of Genesis” (Tsumura, “A Note on הָרֹן,” 400). Not only is it unclear whether “to fear” or “to become agitated” are actually more suitable to the context of Gen 3:16 than “conception” or “pregnancy,” as Tsumura seems to suggest, but Tsumura’s proposal also seems to gloss over the difficulties with the Akkadian root. The sense “to tremble” could potentially fit the context of Gen 3:16, but this meaning is not listed in *CAD* for the Akkadian *arāru*, and at least one of the two passages Tsumura cites to

Understandably, then, Provan sharply critiques commentators and translators who, while acknowledging the literal meaning of the terms here to be “pain and pregnancy,” nevertheless translate עֲצָבוֹנְךָ וְהָרָגְךָ as “your pain in childbirth/childbearing” on the basis of a presumed hendiadys.²⁹⁶ For even if עֲצָבוֹן was to be understood as “pain,” the proper rendering, with a hendiadys, would be something like “your pain in conception” or “your pangs that result from your pregnancy,” rather than “your pain in childbirth,” since הָרוֹן means not “childbirth” but “pregnancy” or “conception.” Curley and Peterson add that “another argument against הָרוֹן being rendered as labor/childbirth” is that “the general means by which the authors of the MT expressed the idea of giving birth” throughout the MT was by using the verb יָלַד.²⁹⁷ Thus, Curley and Peterson conclude that “the traditional interpretation of ‘pain in childbirth’ (e.g., NASB)” does not do justice “to the general usage of” הָרוֹן and עֲצָבוֹן elsewhere.²⁹⁸

support the claim that *arāru* means “to tremble” appears to use a different verb, *narātu* (see Tsumura, “A Note on הָרוֹן,” 400n11). Additionally, as Tsumura himself acknowledges, *CAD* notes that “the difficult group of homonymous verbs (*h/w*)*arāru* pose problems which have not yet been adequately solved” (*CAD* 1.2:238). It thus seems questionable whether the meaning “to tremble” is well-founded for the Akkadian *arāru*. Because Tsumura’s proposal seems to lack solid comparative philological evidence, it is probably preferable to follow the traditional understanding of הָרוֹן as a by-form of הָרִיִן, derived from הָרָה, “to conceive, be pregnant.” Further support for this understanding comes from the Samaritan Pentateuch, which here has הָרִיִן, from הָרִיִן.

²⁹⁶ Provan, “Pain,” 292. Provan notes, for example, that “Skinner...in the space of a few lines moves without blinking (and without explanation) from a literal reading involving ‘suffering and pregnancy’ to a rendering arising out of the acceptance of hendiadys, which involves ‘the pain of thy conception’” (Provan, “Pain,” 292; citing Skinner, 82). As another example, Provan points out that “Speiser tells us that this ‘parade example of hendiadys’ signifies ‘your pangs that result from your pregnancy,’ but his translation of the *text* offers ‘your pangs in childbearing’ and he confusingly tells us that a literal rendering (not assuming hendiadys) would be ‘your pangs and your childbearing’” (Provan, “Pain,” 293; citing E. A. Speiser, *Genesis: Introduction, Translation and Notes*, Anchor Bible Commentary [Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1964], 22–24). See Provan, “Pain,” 292–93, for further examples and discussion.

²⁹⁷ Curley and Peterson, 162.

²⁹⁸ Curley and Peterson, 162.

According to proponents of an emotional interpretation, the mistaken interpretation of הָרֹחַן as a term describing childbirth—as well as the fact that עֲצַב is never used of childbirth pain and none of the usual terms for childbirth pain (צִיר, חֵייל, חֶבֶל, and צִיר) are employed in Gen 3:16—are serious weaknesses of the traditional view. Based on these critiques, Provan concludes that “it is quite unlikely, then, that labour pains are in view in Genesis 3.16.”²⁹⁹

Proposed Solution: Emotional Pain

In light of the difficulties noted above, Provan and others, seeking to offer an alternative approach, propose that Gen 3:16—and particularly Gen 3:16a—speaks not of the physical pains of childbirth but of emotional pain.³⁰⁰ The primary argument made to support this proposal involves an appeal to the meaning of the root עֲצַב. Provan suggests that the “root” עֲצַב “is used of emotional pain³⁰¹ and of the pain involved in work,”³⁰² as well as of “a more generalized kind of pain.”³⁰³ John Walton notes that the verb “occurs in a wide range of stems with a semantic range that primarily expresses grief and worry,” while the other nouns from the root “refer to pain, agony, hardship, worry, nuisance, and

²⁹⁹ Iain Provan, *Discovering Genesis: Content, Interpretation, Reception* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 87.

³⁰⁰ Interestingly, it is sometimes the case that only one of the two first lines of Gen 3:16 is read as describing emotional pain, though there are some who take both lines as emotional. Most often, it is the first line that is interpreted in an emotional sense (see, e.g., Curley and Peterson, Walton), though Carol Meyers, as discussed below, in her later publications takes only the second line as emotional.

³⁰¹ Here Provan points to Gen 6:6 (עֲצַב); 2 Sam 19:3[2] (עֲצַב); Ps 139:24 (עֲצַב); Prov 15:1 (עֲצַב).

³⁰² For pain involved in work, Provan cites Gen 3:17 (עֲצַבוֹן); 5:29 (עֲצַבוֹן); Ps 127:2 (עֲצַב); Prov 5:10 (עֲצַב); 10:22 (עֲצַב); 14:23 (עֲצַב).

³⁰³ For this category, he notes only Isa 14:3, which uses the noun עֲצַב (Provan, “Pain,” 288).

anxiety”; he then concludes that “the root is not typically used to target physical pain, but mental or psychological anguish.”³⁰⁴ Curley and Peterson claim that there are “no fewer than six other cases in the MT where the root עִצַּב carries with it the nuance of emotional distress.”³⁰⁵ For most proponents of an emotional interpretation, a brief mention of the meaning of the root—whether the meaning of the verb עִצַּב, other nouns from this root, or both—is taken as sufficient evidence that עִצְבוֹן thus means something like “emotional anguish.”³⁰⁶ Curley and Peterson add, in support of this conclusion, that Ps 16:4 sets “a precedent for understanding the substantive form of עִצַּב along with the use of the verb רָבָה (‘to increase’)...as increased emotional turmoil.”³⁰⁷ In sum, the primary evidence set forth for the emotional interpretation—at least of Gen 3:16a—is the purported emotional meaning of the root עִצַּב, from which עִצְבוֹן is derived.

³⁰⁴ John H. Walton, *Genesis*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 227.

³⁰⁵ Curley and Peterson, 160. The passages they cite in support of this claim use various terms from this root: עִצְבוֹת in Job 9:28; Prov 10:10; 15:13; עִצַּב in Prov 15:1; מְעִצְבָּה in Isa 50:11; and עִצַּב in Ps 139:24. See also Andrew Crislip, “Emotions in Eden and After: Ancient Jewish and Christian Perspectives on Genesis 2–4,” *Journal of the Bible and its Reception* 6, no. 1 (2019): 103; Walton, 227.

In making such claims, scholars often appeal to the lexical work of Carol Meyers, who argues that the verb עִצַּב means “to upset, to grieve” and is primarily used of “psychological or emotional discomfort,” not physical pain (Carol Meyers, *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988], 104; Carol Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013], 90; Carol Meyers, “Genesis 3:16—Text and Context,” *Religions* 15, no. 8 [2024]: 7n18). In making this assertion about the meaning of the verb, Meyers consistently suggests that the one passage that would seem to indicate physical pain (Eccl 10:9) in fact refers to an injury rather than the accompanying pain of that injury.

Given the way that Meyers’ work is cited as evidence in support of the emotional interpretation of Gen 3:16, it is important to note that Meyers herself does not land on a solely emotional interpretation of Gen 3:16a (though in her later works she does see emotional elements in 3:16b; see below). (While Curley and Peterson point out that “Meyers rejects the idea of ‘mental suffering’ in Gen 3:16 and opts for the idea of increased toil/work” [160], Crislip, whose argument is entirely dependent on Meyers’ work, neglects to mention Meyers’ actual conclusion about the noun עִצְבוֹן.)

³⁰⁶ Curley and Peterson, 160; Crislip, 103; Walton, 227; Provan, “Pain,” 290.

³⁰⁷ Curley and Peterson, 160.

Some proponents of this view attempt to demonstrate that their emotional interpretation of עֲצָבוֹן in Gen 3:16 works in the other passages where עֲצָבוֹן is found, namely, Gen 3:17 and 5:29. Curley and Peterson, for example, after arguing that עֲצָבוֹן in Gen 3:16 is “emotional turmoil,” argue that this emotional sense is present in both Gen 3:17 and 5:29. In discussing these other two uses, the authors seem to be more open to the possibility of some physical aspect of pain; they conclude that, in the three uses of עֲצָבוֹן, “both physical *and* emotional aspects of the curse on humanity resulting from the fall seem to be implied.”³⁰⁸ However, in their ensuing discussion, as in their translation (“sorrow”), they seem to view the emotional aspect as primary. Others, such as Crislip, seem to read עֲצָבוֹן solely as emotional pain. Though he makes no comment on Gen 5:29, Crislip notes that “emotionality resonates also in God’s sentence upon the man (Gen 3:17)...the core referent here is not the work itself, but emotional suffering in the face of unpleasant work.”³⁰⁹ While some proponents of this view make no mention of the other uses of עֲצָבוֹן (Gen 3:17; 5:29), both Curley and Peterson as well as Crislip seek to demonstrate that their emotional interpretation of Gen 3:16 is fitting in the other uses of עֲצָבוֹן. This fittingness, in turn, seems to then be viewed as further evidence supporting the emotional interpretation of Gen 3:16.

As in the physical pain interpretation, a hendiadys is often accepted in the emotional interpretation of Gen 3:16a, though some proponents seem open to reading this line without a hendiadys. Walton takes עֲצָבוֹנָה וְהָרְגָה as a hendiadys conveying “something

³⁰⁸ Curley and Peterson, 160 (emphasis original).

³⁰⁹ Crislip, 103.

like ‘conception anxiety.’”³¹⁰ Curley and Peterson arrive at the rendering “your sorrowful conceptions” or, if no hendiadys is assumed, “your sorrow *in* your conception.”³¹¹ Like Curley and Peterson, Provan remains open to a reading with a hendiadys, referring to “the multiplication of painful conception,” or without a hendiadys, referring to “the multiplication (separately) of pain and conception.”³¹²

Some who argue for an emotional interpretation of the first line of Gen 3:16 nevertheless grant that the second line does describe pain related to the process of childbirth. Curley and Peterson—though adamantly denying any reference to physical childbirth pain in the first line—suggest that the second line describes “pain in childbirth,” by which they seem to mean the physical pain of childbirth. This claim comes in a section in which they propose that the parallel line (Gen 3:16b) supports their reading of Gen 3:16a. Their argument is based on a view of parallelism that understands the “B” clause as going beyond or carrying forward the “A” clause.³¹³ Based on the parallelism, Curley and Peterson conclude that “contextually, the aspect of the curse of ‘pain in childbirth’ is already handled in the ‘B’ clause,” which carries “‘A’ further by commenting on the actual event of childbirth after a woman does conceive,” whereas “the preceding clause points to something *before* the actual delivery, namely, sorrowful

³¹⁰ Walton, 227.

³¹¹ Curley and Peterson, 164.

³¹² Provan, “Pain,” 292. In his later publication, however, Provan makes no mention of the hendiadys issue and simply translates “I will greatly increase your pain and your conception; in painful circumstances you will give birth to children” (*Discovering Genesis*, 87).

³¹³ Curley and Peterson, 165, referencing James L. Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry: Parallelism and Its History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1981), 52.

conceptions.”³¹⁴ In other words, because the parallel line describes pain in childbirth, the first line must describe something different. Thus, according to Curley and Peterson, the parallelism between these two lines—and the fact that the second line describes pain in childbirth—provides support for their emotional interpretation of the first line. Given that they concluded only a few pages before—on the basis of the other usages of the root עִצַּב—that עִצְבוֹן must mean emotional turmoil, it is perplexing, to say the least, that the authors here seem to accept that עִצָּב, from the same root, means physical pain.³¹⁵ However, apart from this brief mention, their discussion seems to be concerned only with the emotional aspect of pain in Gen 3:16.

Though using different logic, Walton comes to a somewhat similar conclusion. While interpreting עִצְבוֹן as “anxiety,” Walton comments that the noun used in the second line, עִצָּב, “is used elsewhere to refer to strenuous work and is therefore an appropriate description of giving birth.”³¹⁶ How Walton arrived at the notion of “strenuous work” here is unclear, as his previous comments on “the nouns from this root” only proposed meanings related to emotional suffering: “pain, agony, hardship, worry, nuisance, and anxiety.”³¹⁷ However, Walton does not seem to see any problem with this, nor does he go any further in explaining the meaning of this second line.

³¹⁴ Curley and Peterson, 165 (emphasis original). Thus, in Gen 3:16, the A clause, “I will greatly increase your sorrowful conceptions,” would be carried further by the B clause, which describes “the actual event of childbirth after a woman does conceive: ‘in toil/pain you will bring forth children.’”

³¹⁵ See further discussion and critique below.

³¹⁶ Walton, 227.

³¹⁷ Walton, 227.

Others, however, take Gen 3:16b as having an emotional sense. Carol Meyers, though originally arguing that the first two lines of Gen 3:16 both refer to “toil,”³¹⁸ shifts to viewing the second line, בְּעֶצֶב תֵּלְדִי בָנִים, as describing emotional pain in her later publications. Regarding this line, Meyers suggests that when the term יָלַד refers “to a mother giving birth, it is usually used intransitively”; when used transitively, as in Gen 3:16, “it means becoming a parent.”³¹⁹ Thus, according to Meyers, Gen 3:16b describes not childbirth or labor specifically but having children, or becoming a parent, more generally. The term עֶצֶב, Meyers argues, “denotes either mental anguish or work” but here “likely signifies mental anguish rather than toil: the stress or exhaustion accompanying parenthood.”³²⁰ Meyers is followed in this interpretation of the second line by Crislip, who thus interprets both lines as referring solely to emotional pain.³²¹ Though offering little explicit discussion of the second line, Provan seems to treat the two lines as essentially synonymous, both describing emotional sorrow: “I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; in sorrow and hardship you shall bring forth children.”³²²

While proponents of this view agree that Gen 3:16 describes emotional pain, there are various proposals regarding the nature or cause of this pain. Curley and Peterson argue that the emotional pain here is specifically that “experienced by women when faced

³¹⁸ See further discussion of Meyers’ position below.

³¹⁹ Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve*, 92. See also Meyers, *Discovering Eve*, 106. Meyers there notes that יָלַד can be “applied to either or both parents,” noting specifically the usage in biblical genealogies, which have “the (male) ancestral figures ‘bearing’ the succeeding generations. Obviously, they do not give birth in the literal sense. Rather, they become parents, a status related to the object (the names of children) of this transitively used verb in the genealogies.”

³²⁰ Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve*, 92.

³²¹ Crislip, 104.

³²² Provan, “Pain,” 294.

with the inability to have children”³²³—that is, the emotional pain, or sorrow, of infertility. Walton broadens the scope of things, proposing that these lines are “an extended merism (two endpoints used to refer to everything in between, e.g., ‘soup to nuts’) referring to the anxiety that a woman will experience through the whole process from conception to birth.” This includes, according to Walton, anxiety “about whether she will be able to conceive a child, anxiety that comes with all the physical discomfort of pregnancy, anxiety concerning the health of the child in the womb, and anxiety about whether she and the baby will survive the birth process.”³²⁴ Crislip differs slightly in that he seems to view the supposed emotional pain here as grief associated not with infertility but with an awareness of mortality.³²⁵ Meyers, who views the second line as describing emotional pain, suggests that עֲצָרָה “connotes the stress—the mental anguish (cf. KJV, ‘sorrow’) and exhaustion—accompanying parenthood.”³²⁶

While likewise holding to a non-physical interpretation, Provan also offers a slightly different explanation—though perhaps it would be more appropriate to say explanations, for Provan appears to vacillate between different ideas regarding the nature of the pain. At one point, he suggests the “‘pain’ (עֲצָרָה) with which ‘you will give birth to children’” should be understood as a reference to “the ‘agony, hardship, worry, nuisance, and anxiety’ of the circumstances into which children are born and then raised, and in

³²³ Curley and Peterson, 164.

³²⁴ Walton, 227. Walton thus paraphrases these lines, “I will greatly increase the anguish you will experience in the birthing process, from the anxiety surrounding conception to the strenuous work of giving birth.”

³²⁵ Crislip, 104.

³²⁶ Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve*, 92.

which they die.”³²⁷ However, he immediately adds here that “nothing forbids us from understanding it as referring,” at least in part, to “challenging (painful) economic circumstances.”³²⁸ At another point, Provan suggests that עֶצְבוֹן and עֶצָב refer to “pain of body and of mind in general, as children are brought into the world.”³²⁹ In a later publication, he suggests the “generalized pain” of Gen 3:16 is connected to “marital dysfunction.”³³⁰ It is thus difficult to pinpoint exactly what Provan’s conclusion is. In any case, Provan is adamant that there is no reference here to painful birthing. He recommends adjusting Walton’s proposal—that Gen 3:16 refers “to the anxiety that a woman will experience through the whole process from conception to birth”³³¹—to allow the woman’s “anxiety” to extend beyond simply the period between conception and birth: “she conceives in painful circumstances just as she gives birth in painful circumstances, including economic circumstances, and no doubt raises children and watches some of them die in those same circumstances.”³³²

³²⁷ Provan, “Pain,” 290, here citing Walton, 227 who uses the language of “agony, hardship, worry, nuisance, and anxiety.”

³²⁸ Provan, “Pain,” 290.

³²⁹ Provan, “Pain,” 292.

³³⁰ Provan, *Discovering Genesis*, 87. Here, Provan writes, “Whence might come this generalized pain? The context in Genesis 3 suggests that it is most immediately connected with the change that occurs in the woman’s relationship with her husband,” which is described in the second half of Gen 3:16. Provan explains that “she now finds herself embroiled with him in a struggle for dominance; she will therefore experience family in the context of pain.” He also adds that “this same reality of marital dysfunction may indeed also explain the reference to the increase in the number of her conceptions. Possibly the idea is that sex will become detached from sensible, responsible dominion of the world, which should involve among other things a commitment to the well-being of all human beings (including all women)” (Provan, *Discovering Genesis*, 87).

³³¹ Walton, 227.

³³² Provan, “Pain,” 293.

Though it diverges from most contemporary translations, the emotional view does find support in the KJV, which renders עֲצָבוֹן with “sorrow”: “Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children.” Provan also mentions in support of this interpretation Jerome, “whose Vulgate translation speaks of the multiplication of ‘your toils and your conceptions’ and predicts that ‘in grief you will bear children.’”³³³

Strengths

The primary strength of the emotional interpretation is the recognition that עֲצָב is not typically used of physical pain or birth pain, nor הֵרֶוֶן of childbirth. Proponents of an emotional view are right to critique the inconsistencies and the deficient explanations offered by commentators who hold to a traditional translation, as Crislip does when he writes that “scholars may even note how inaptly ‘pain’ or ‘pangs’ capture the Hebrew, yet still translate the oracle somatically.”³³⁴ Provan similarly levels a harsh critique against commentators who find a reference to painful birthing with seemingly little justification or explanation aside from the assumption of a hendiadys: “The invocation of hendiadys does not magically allow the transformation of הֵרֶוֶן (conception) into בָּטֵן (pregnancy) or לֵדָה (birth)—although it is such alchemy that commentators and

³³³ Provan, “Pain,” 294.

³³⁴ Crislip, 109. Crislip here points to Cuthbert Simpson, who, while noting that “the emotional language of the KJV... ‘is a more literal rendering of the Hebrew than’ the then current RSV’s ‘your pain in childbearing,’” nevertheless “rejects the KJV’s translation. Emotional suffering, [Simpson] explains, cannot reflect how Israelite women *really* felt about childbirth: ‘Since, however, for a Hebrew woman conception was not a burden but a joy, the word [sorrow] can scarcely be original here’” (Crislip, 109, citing Cuthbert Simpson, “The Book of Genesis,” in *The Interpreter’s Bible*, ed. G. A. Buttrick [Nashville: Abingdon, 1952], 1:509). See also Wenham, who notes that “neither the word used here for ‘pain,’ עֲצָב, nor the earlier one, עֲצָבוֹן, is the usual one for the pangs of childbirth,” but nevertheless seems to view this verse as a reference to pain of childbirth (Wenham, 81).

translators have nonetheless attempted to deploy, when they have read עֲצַבֹּנָךְ וְהִרְגִּיךְ as referring to pains in pregnancy or birth.”³³⁵ Proponents of the emotional approach thus rightly recognize some of the difficulties of the traditional approach.

Weaknesses

However, the emotional interpretation ultimately fails to provide a satisfactory alternative to the traditional view. A number of weaknesses can be identified in the emotional approach, both in its critiques of the physical view and in its proposed solution.

One major problem with its critique of the physical view is the assumption that because there are no other occasions where the “root עֲצַב is used to refer to labour-pains,” it is not possible for these terms to be used in reference to labor pains. Not only does this claim show evidence of the root fallacy,³³⁶ but it seems that most who level this critique are working with a faulty view of sense and reference. While it would be correct to say that “labor pains” is not the sense, or meaning, of the verb עֲצַב, nor of its related nouns, it is nevertheless still possible that the term could be used in reference to childbirth. Simply because it is not used in reference to childbirth pain elsewhere in the texts available to us does not rule out the possibility that it *could* be used in such a way.

Additionally, the argument that none of the typical vocabulary for childbirth pain (e.g., חֵיל) is used in Gen 3:16 is problematic because, first, it is questionable whether these terms were options available to the author of Genesis, and second, such a claim again seems to be operating with a mistaken understanding of sense and reference.

³³⁵ Provan, “Pain,” 292. See further discussion above, as well as Provan, “Pain,” 292–93.

³³⁶ See further discussion below.

Scholars here seem to be assuming that for there to be a reference to childbirth pain, a word such as היל must be used. This argument fails to realize that the same referent could also be described with a term that has a different sense. For, as Barr notes, “an object or event may be signified by word *a* or by word *b*. This does not mean that *a* means *b*.... The identity of the object to which different designations are given does not imply that these designations have the same semantic value.”³³⁷ In other words, the event of childbirth pain could be signified by היל or perhaps עִצְבוֹן, but this does not mean that these words are then synonymous, both meaning “childbirth pains.” The words can have distinct senses and still be used to refer to the same situation. Thus, simply because a word with the specific *sense* “labor pangs” is not used does not make impossible a reference to some kind of physical suffering related to childbearing.³³⁸

In addition to the weaknesses found in these critiques of the traditional view, a number of problems can be identified in the arguments typically made to support an emotional pain interpretation. First, the lexical arguments used to support this view are weak and often highly problematic. To determine the meaning of עִצְבוֹן, proponents of this view look not at the actual usage of this noun but at the meaning of the “root.” In doing so, they often fail to make a distinction between the different nouns or between the verb and nouns from the root; these terms are treated as a single entity that carries a common core of meaning. Provan, for example, seems to treat all occurrences of the verb and nouns together, when he writes that the “root עִצַּב” is used of “emotional pain and of the

³³⁷ Barr, *Semantics*, 217–18.

³³⁸ See further discussion below.

pain involved in work. It can also be used of a more generalized kind of pain.”³³⁹ The passages cited as examples of “emotional pain” feature a number of different words from the root, including the verb עִצַּב (Gen 6:6, hithp.; 2 Sam 19:3[2], niph.), the noun עִצָּב (Ps 139:24), and the noun עִצְבוֹן (Prov 15:1).³⁴⁰ In arguing for an emotional meaning for עִצְבוֹן, Curley and Peterson similarly appeal to places where “the root עִצַּב carries with it the nuance of emotional distress”; in their list of examples, four distinct terms are included, only one of which (עִצָּב) is used in Gen 3:16: עִצְרָתָּה (Job 9:28; Prov 10:10; 15:13), עִצָּב (Prov 15:1), מְעַצְרָה (Isa 50:11), and עִצָּב (Ps 139:24).³⁴¹

Aside from the fact that it could be debated whether all of these occurrences carry “the nuance of emotional distress,”³⁴² such an appeal to a “root” meaning is lexicographically problematic. These claims are obvious examples of the root fallacy, the idea that there is a “‘root meaning’ which is effective throughout all the variations given to the root by affixes and formative elements, and that therefore the ‘root meaning’ can confidently be taken to be part of the actual semantic value of any word or form which

³³⁹ Provan, “Pain,” 288.

³⁴⁰ In the passages cited as describing “the pain involved in work,” multiple derived nouns are again found, including עִצְבוֹן (Gen 3:17; 5:29) and עִצָּב (Ps 127:2; Prov 5:10; 10:22; 14:23); for the “generalized pain” category, Provan lists only one passage, Isa 14:3, which uses the noun עִצָּב. It is perplexing that Provan includes this occurrence in this third category, when Isa 14:3 would seem to be related to pain involved in work. It is unclear whether other terms or occurrences are to be included in this category, since Provan here offers readers only a single example.

³⁴¹ Curley and Peterson, 160. Like Curley and Peterson, as well as Provan, Walton also speaks of the meaning of “the root עִצַּב” in his discussion. After noting that nouns from the same root “refer to pain, agony, hardship, worry, nuisance, and anxiety” and that the verb “expresses grief and worry,” Walton concludes that “the root is not typically used to target physical pain, but mental or psychological anguish” (Walton, 227).

³⁴² In Isa 50:11, לְמַעַצְרָה תִּשְׁכָּבוּ, “you will lie down in a place of pain,” for example, it is not clear that the nuance is of emotional distress; the noun is a hapax legomenon, and the context does not provide sufficient evidence for this claim.

can be assigned to an identifiable root.”³⁴³ The appeal to the meaning of the “root” to define עֲצָבוֹן rests on the assumption that these terms all have some common meaning because they come from the same root etymologically. But as Barr notes, “the ‘meaning’ of a ‘root’ is not necessarily part of the meaning of a derived form.”³⁴⁴ While sometimes there is a connection between the sense of a verb and the sense of a derived noun, this is not always the case. It is often the case that “the significance of the root is historical and is not a guide in itself to the sense of the words.”³⁴⁵ Nevertheless, proponents of the emotional approach, without hesitation, take the root עצב as an accurate guide to the meaning of the word עֲצָבוֹן. This approach seems to be entirely dependent on the assumption that there is a connection between the meaning of the root and the meaning of the noun עֲצָבוֹן.

The emotional interpretation, in its problematic appeal to the “root meaning” as the primary evidence of the meaning of the derived word עֲצָבוֹן, thus appears to rest on a very precarious foundation. In general, the context of actual usage should be given priority over the “root meaning” when determining the sense of derived noun, for semantic value “has to be determined from the current usage and not from the

³⁴³ Barr, *Semantics*, 100.

³⁴⁴ Barr, *Semantics*, 102. Barr uses the example of the nouns לֶחֶם “bread” and מִלְחָמָה “war,” noting that “it must be regarded as doubtful whether the influence of their common root is of any importance semantically in classical Hebrew in the normal usage of the words. And it would be utterly fanciful to connect the two as mutually suggestive or evocative, as if battles were normally for the sake of bread or bread a necessary provision for battles” (102).

³⁴⁵ Barr, *Semantics*, 102. As J. Vendryes writes, “words are not used according to their historical value. The mind forgets—assuming that it ever knew—the semantic evolutions through which the words have passed. Words always have a *current* value, that is to say, limited to the moment when they are employed, and a *particular* value relative to the momentary use made of them” (J. Vendryes, *Language: A Linguistic Introduction to History* [New York: Alfred Knopf, 1925], 176, cited in Silva, *Biblical Words*, 46–47).

derivation.”³⁴⁶ That is, a determination of the meaning of a term should be made by looking at all occurrences of the term in question before appealing to the meanings of terms from the same root, whether other nouns or a verb. However, in defining עֲצָבוֹן, proponents of an emotional interpretation prioritize the meaning of the verb and other nouns from the root rather than the actual usages of the nouns in question.

Doing so is in fact unavoidable, however, if one wants to argue for the emotional pain interpretation, because—while it is true that some terms from the root עֲצָב in fact can mean “emotional pain”—other terms, including the very terms used in Gen 3:16, seem to have the sense “toil.”³⁴⁷ The second major weakness of this interpretation, then, is that, even if the meaning of the “root” was a reliable guide to the meaning of a single noun from the root, one must overlook certain terms from this root in order to propose that the primary meaning of the “root” is “emotional turmoil.” Curley and Peterson, for example, argue that “there are no fewer than six other cases in the MT where the root עֲצָב carries with it the nuance of emotional distress (Job 9:28; Prov 10:10; 15:1, 13; Isa 50:11; Ps 139:24),”³⁴⁸ and this is seen as evidence that עֲצָבוֹן in Gen 3:16 also carries the nuance of emotional distress. But following this same logic, one could also note that there are no fewer than six times where “the root עֲצָב” carries with it a nuance related to toil or labor (עֲצָב, Ps 127:2; Prov 5:10; 14:23; עֲצָבוֹן, Gen 3:17; 5:29; עֲצָב, Isa 58:3; perh. also עֲצָב, Isa

³⁴⁶ Barr, *Semantics*, 107.

³⁴⁷ As noted in the discussion in Chapter 2 above, these include at least the nouns עֲצָב, עֲצָב, and עֲצָבוֹן.

³⁴⁸ Curley and Peterson, 160. Again, the passages cited to support this claim feature no less than four distinct terms, only one of which is used in Gen 3:16: עֲצָבָה (Job 9:28; Prov 10:10; 15:13), עֲצָב (Prov 15:1), מִעֲצָבָה (Isa 50:11), and עֲצָב (Ps 139:24).

14:3) and conclude that the noun עֲצָבוֹן therefore carries a nuance related to toil.³⁴⁹ Curley and Peterson’s argument fails to cover the data, as they must be selective in their presentation of the evidence in order to make these claims.

In short, in addition to demonstrating the root fallacy, the primary argument made by proponents of an emotional interpretation is problematic because it overlooks the fact that some of the terms from this root may have the sense “toil,” not simply “sorrow.”³⁵⁰ Of course, the fact that some of these terms can mean “toil” does not necessarily imply they have this sense in Gen 3:16; nevertheless, it is certainly a significant weakness of the emotional interpretation that there are terms from this root that elsewhere mean not

³⁴⁹ Curley and Peterson later seem to explicitly attribute an emotional sense to some of the passages where the sense “toil” would evidently be more suitable, when they note that “various lexemes deriving from the root עֲצָב—often reflecting the emotive nuance—are attested throughout the MT (e.g., Gen 3:16; 1 Chr 4:9; Ps 127:2; 139:24; Prov 5:10; 10:22; 15:1 [adjectival force]; Isa 14:3)” (Curley and Peterson, 161). The authors here fail to recognize that in some of these passages, the nouns in question most likely have the sense “toil” rather than emotional pain (Ps 127:2; Prov 5:10; perh. Isa 14:3).

³⁵⁰ Provan similarly commits this error when he writes, “if we were to take our lead from what is ‘usual’ elsewhere in the Old Testament, we would certainly understand the ‘pain’ (עֲצָב) with which ‘you will give birth to children’ in the second part of Gen 3:16a as referring to the ‘agony, hardship, worry, nuisance, and anxiety’ of the circumstances into which children are born and then raised, and in which they die” (“Pain,” 290, citing Walton, 227). Again, such argumentation exhibits the root fallacy, as it seems to assume a “usual” or core meaning for the root is present in all occurrences of its derived terms; in support of this point, he mentions 2 Sam 19:3[2], which uses the verbal form. But further, in suggesting the “usual” meaning is related to emotional pain, Provan also overlooks the fact that some of the nouns from the root “usually” describe toil.

Crislip is similarly discriminatory in his presentation of the data. Though his argument is completely dependent on Meyers’ lexical work, Crislip fails to mention certain points in Meyers’ discussion of the data that would contradict his position. Crislip notes that the Hebrew root עֲצָב, according to Meyers, “means ‘to upset, to grieve,’ and the instances of this verb in the Hebrew Bible ‘refer explicitly to psychological or emotional discomfort, not to physical pain’” (Crislip, 103, citing Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve*, 90–93). He then goes on to state that the various related forms and derived nouns also “do not refer to bodily pain or injury, but refer to ‘mental anguish,’ as Meyers puts it” (Crislip, 103). However, in appealing to Meyers’ explanation, Crislip fails to mention her claim that some of the terms from this root in fact denote not “mental anguish” but rather “physical toil.” In fact, Meyers’ whole discussion of the noun עֲצָבוֹן—where she decisively concludes that the meaning of this term is *not* mental anguish or pain but physical toil (Meyers, *Discovering Eve*, 104; *Rediscovering Eve*, 91)—is completely omitted from Crislip’s presentation of the evidence. This allows him to conclude that “God’s oracle of Gen 3:16–17 speaks of pain and suffering holistically, with a focus on emotional pain, especially sadness, sorrow, or grief” (Crislip, 128).

“emotional pain” but “toil”—and in fact it is precisely these terms that are used in this passage (עֲצָבוֹן and עֵצֶב).

Third, after the debated term עֲצָבוֹן is defined as “emotional turmoil” in Gen 3:16 on the basis of the “root meaning,” scholars then must multiply hypotheses to make this definition fit in the other passages where the noun is used. As discussed further below, an examination of all uses of the noun עֲצָבוֹן reveals that in its other two uses, a different sense might be more fitting. But rather than starting by looking at all occurrences of the term עֲצָבוֹן to determine its meaning, Curley and Peterson conclude that עֲצָבוֹן means “emotional turmoil” in Gen 3:16 and then read this definition onto the other two uses of the noun, where the contexts are quite different. They argue that in Gen 3:17, עֲצָבוֹן “can once again refer to the emotional toil Adam will experience in ‘bringing forth’ fruit/food for his family.”³⁵¹ Regarding Gen 5:29, they then suggest, based upon their “understanding of the usage of עֲצָבוֹן in Gen 3:16 and 17,” that “the author appears to be nuancing” the words מַעֲשֵׂה and עֲצָבוֹן “to mean both the physical and emotional toil associated with the curse.”³⁵² Ultimately, the only evidence they can provide for these claims is their conclusion about the term עֲצָבוֹן in 3:16.³⁵³ The term עֲצָבוֹן is thus

³⁵¹ Curley and Peterson, 160. When they expand on this verse, it seems as though they may allow an aspect of physical pain to be included in this curse: “It is no longer an easy and delightful undertaking to bring forth food but one that is marked with קוֹץ and דֶרֶר (‘thorns and thistles’) accompanied by both physical and emotional heartache” (Curley and Peterson, 160). However, they later seem to suggest that the “physical” aspect is delineated in 3:18–19, while 3:17 describes “emotional turmoil” (Curley and Peterson, 166). Crislip similarly forces this less natural sense into Gen 3:17, when he notes that “emotionality resonates also in God’s sentence upon the man (Gen 3:17)...while modern translations are apt to translate the man’s sentence as different from the woman’s (her *‘iṣṣabon* is ‘pangs,’ his is ‘toil’), the core referent here is not the work itself, but emotional suffering in the face of unpleasant work” (Crislip, 103).

³⁵² Curley and Peterson, 160.

³⁵³ They summarize that, “of the three times where עֲצָבוֹן is used in the MT, both physical *and* emotional aspects of the curse on humanity resulting from the fall seem to be implied” (Curley and Peterson, 160 [emphasis original]). As noted above, however, while mentioning the possibility of a “physical” aspect,

interpreted as having an emotional sense in all its occurrences—even in contexts where this sense is less fitting—based on the authors’ assumption that it describes emotional pain in Gen 3:16.

Such an argument also appears to use circular reasoning, for, as noted above, the authors’ claims regarding the meaning of עֲצַבֹּן in Gen 3:17 and 5:29—which are based on their emotional interpretation of 3:16—seem to then be viewed as further evidence confirming their interpretation of 3:16. Curley and Peterson themselves anticipate the charge of circular reasoning.³⁵⁴ However, their proposed solution is simply to appeal back to the fact that other nouns from the root reflect “emotive nuance” and the verb depicts “emotional pain/grief” in all but three of its 16 usages.³⁵⁵ That is, they appeal back to the meaning of the “root”—the same basis used to define the noun עֲצַבֹּן in the first place.

Fourth, Curley and Peterson’s suggestion that the second line of Gen 3:16 describes “pain in childbirth” seriously undermines and weakens their argument for an emotional interpretation of the first line. As noted above, Curley and Peterson situate their comments regarding the second line in a section arguing that the parallelism of these two lines supports their proposal. The logic seems to be something like: in Hebrew parallelism, the second line always advances (“goes beyond” or “carries forward”) the

Curley and Peterson functionally seem to limit the sense to emotional pain in their discussion, or at least this seems to be their primary concern.

³⁵⁴ They note, “to be sure, some may argue that this is a ‘circular’ argument deriving from a ‘biased’ interpretation of both 3:16a and 5:29” (Curley and Peterson, 160). It is not entirely clear why they note 3:16a and 5:29—it seems that it is their interpretations of 3:17 and 5:29 that are biased by their interpretation of 3:16.

³⁵⁵ Curley and Peterson, 161. It is not clear exactly which 13 usages of the verb they have in mind here. While they do add that “in every case where the verbal form of עֲצַב is used in Genesis, it has the meaning of emotional grief (cf. Gen 6:6; 34:7; 45:5)” and “even in the Primeval History of Gen 1–11, the only appearance of the verbal form of עֲצַב in Gen 6:6 means emotional pain,” these statements ultimately do not help to resolve the issue of circular logic.

thought of the first line; the second line here, *בְּעֵצָב תֵּלְדֵי בְּנִים*, comments on (physical) pain in childbirth; thus, their thesis that the first line describes “sorrowful conceptions” is justified.³⁵⁶ Whether Curley and Peterson’s understanding of parallelism is correct is questionable,³⁵⁷ but even if it were correct, Curley and Peterson cannot claim that the second line describes physical pain in childbirth without undermining their whole argument regarding the first line. The only justification they give for their translation of the second line—“in toil/pain you will bring forth children”—comes in a footnote where they comment that “again, the root *עצב* can carry both the physical and emotive pain of labor and childbirth.”³⁵⁸ But this statement—and indeed their whole conclusion about this second line—seems to entirely contradict their earlier conclusion that *עֲצָבוֹן* is more rightly “translated as emotional sorrow or grief” precisely because the “root” *עצב* means emotional pain.³⁵⁹ For if the root *עצב* can in fact “carry both the physical and emotive

³⁵⁶ Curley and Peterson write that, “following Kugel’s definition [of parallelism], the ‘B’ clause ‘goes beyond’ or ‘carries forward’ the ‘A’ clause. As such, ‘A’ would read: ‘I will greatly increase your sorrowful conceptions’ with the ‘B’ clause carrying ‘A’ further by commenting on the actual event of childbirth after a woman does conceive: ‘in toil/pain you will bring forth children.’” Curley and Peterson then conclude, “therefore, contextually, the aspect of the curse of ‘pain in childbirth’ is already handled in the ‘B’ clause whereas the preceding clause points to something *before* the actual delivery, namely, sorrowful conceptions” (165 [emphasis original]).

³⁵⁷ It is not always the case that the second line in Hebrew parallelism “goes beyond” or advances the first. While Kugel, who Curley and Peterson cite in support of this approach to parallelism, does mention “carrying forward” or “going beyond” as one way in which the B clause can be connected to the A clause, he does not suggest that this is the *only* way that the B clause can function. Kugel notes that there are a variety of ways that B might be connected to A: “carrying it further, echoing it, defining it, restating it, contrasting with it” (51). Kugel does, as Curley and Peterson note, summarize with the formula “‘A, and what’s more, B’” (58), but he also notes that “‘what’s more’ is in itself an inexact version of the concept of subjunction [of B to A]” (57), and he presents a variety of possible “what’s more” relationships: “incomplete B completed by reference to A”; “incomplete A completed by B”; “‘pair-words,’ associated concepts, semantic, syntactic, morphological parallelism (all asserting B’s identity or association with A)”; and “unusual word order, chiasmus,” among others (54–55). Curley and Peterson’s understanding of how parallelism works is thus perhaps too narrow.

³⁵⁸ Curley and Peterson, 165n34.

³⁵⁹ Curley and Peterson, 161.

pain of labor and childbirth,” then there would be no reason why עֲצָבוֹן could not also describe physical pain. By allowing עָצַב in the second line of Gen 3:16 to describe physical childbirth pain, the authors are not only being inconsistent, but they are also undermining their conclusion about the first line, for their argument that עֲצָבוֹן means emotional pain essentially stands or falls on the claim that the “root” means emotional pain. Thus, rather than providing support for their emotional interpretation of עֲצָבוֹן, Curley and Peterson’s conclusion about עָצַב in Gen 3:16b actually undercuts this interpretation, since the authors seem to abandon and contradict the whole basis on which their emotional interpretation is built.³⁶⁰

While proponents of the emotional view are right to critique some of the problems in the traditional physical interpretation and seek to more accurately interpret key terms such as עֲצָבוֹן and הָרוֹן, the discussion above reveals that their proposed solution is problematic in a number of ways, particularly with respect to their use of lexical arguments. This leads to a third major approach, which also sees problems with the traditional interpretation.

³⁶⁰ A similar problem is found in Walton’s assertion that עָצַב means “strenuous work,” which would seem to be at odds with his earlier conclusion that עֲצָבוֹן means “anxiety” because the verb and other nouns from the root typically describe “psychological anguish” (Walton, 227). If עָצַב, a noun from this same root, can mean “strenuous work,” why is “strenuous work” not included within the range of meaning Walton offers for the root עָצַב and thus considered as a possible meaning for עֲצָבוֹן? Though to a lesser degree than in Curley and Peterson’s case, Walton’s assertion also makes evident some inconsistencies in his argumentation that weaken his proposal.

Physical Toil or Labor

Perhaps one of the most vocal advocates against a traditional interpretation of Gen 3:16 is Carol Meyers.³⁶¹ In multiple publications across 40 years,³⁶² Meyers has argued against a physical birth pain interpretation of Gen 3:16 and proposed that the woman's punishment involves an increase in pregnancies and exhausting physical toil.³⁶³

Critique of Traditional View

Meyers' approach overlaps significantly with the emotional interpretation in terms of its criticisms of the traditional view. She critiques the physical pain view by pointing out that עֲצָבוֹן “never means childbirth pain in other biblical texts”³⁶⁴ and noting that biblical Hebrew contains other vocabulary for childbirth pain, such as חָיִל, חֶבֶל, and צִיר; these terms “appear often in childbirth imagery,” but עֲצָבוֹן does not.³⁶⁵ Additionally, Meyers points out that הָרֶוֶן is better understood as “pregnancy,” not childbirth.³⁶⁶ Meyers

³⁶¹ While others have followed Meyers' approach, I will primarily be engaging here with Meyers, as she is the major representative of this view.

³⁶² Here, I am primarily interacting with Meyers' two most recent publications (*Rediscovering Eve* [2013] and “Genesis 3:16” [2024]), as they not only reflect her current position but also seem to contain the best and strongest presentation of her argument. While these most recent works are not without their difficulties, they also clearly demonstrate significant growth and development in Meyers' thinking and argumentation since her earliest publications on this topic (“Gender Roles and Genesis 3:16 Revisited,” in *The Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth: Essays in Honor of David Noel Freedman in Celebration of his Sixtieth Birthday*, ed. Carol L. Meyers and M. O'Connor [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1983], 337–54; *Discovering Eve* [1988]).

³⁶³ In the later iterations of her proposal, as briefly noted above, Meyers interprets the second line of Gen 3:16 as describing mental anguish. Although I will be engaging with these more recent iterations, the discussion here will be primarily focused on her understanding of the first line as describing physical toil.

³⁶⁴ Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve*, 90.

³⁶⁵ Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve*, 90; see also Jacques van Ruiten, “Eve's Pain in Childbearing? Interpretations of Gen 3 in Biblical and Early Jewish Texts,” in *Eve's Children: The Biblical Stories Retold and Interpreted in Jewish and Christian Traditions*, ed. Gerard P. Luttikhuisen (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 5.

³⁶⁶ Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve*, 89; van Ruiten, 4.

argues that עֲצֻבוֹן thus cannot mean “pain” because then “the first line would be proclaiming painful pregnancy.” Such a proclamation, according to Meyers, would be problematic because “normal pregnancies involve discomfort but are not particularly painful, and no biblical passage mentioning pregnancy associates it with pain.”³⁶⁷ Meyers even goes so far as to claim that “if ‘pregnancy’ is the better translation of the second noun, the first one cannot be ‘pain.’”³⁶⁸

Proposed Solution

Meyers then turns to ask what, then, עֲצֻבוֹן actually means. She makes a few additional points. First, Meyers looks at the verb עֲצַב, which she suggests “refers to *emotional* or *mental distress*, not physical pain”; she notes in support Isa 54:6, where “an

³⁶⁷ Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve*, 90. This claim—that “normal pregnancies...are not particularly painful”—is of course highly debatable. Many women today suffer from significant illness, pain, and exhaustion during pregnancy; most likely these difficulties and pains would have been even greater in the ancient world, where women lacked modern painkillers.

Meyers also posits another “reason to reject ‘childbirth’ as a translation” of הָרוֹן, related to the parallelism between the two lines, הָרָבָה אֲרָבָה עֲצֻבוֹנָה וְהָרִנָּה // בְּעֲצָב תֵּלְדִי בָגִים. Based on an assumption that “exact synonyms are rarely used in parallel lines,” Meyers contends that הָרוֹן cannot have the sense “childbirth” because the parallel line does refer to childbirth (with the term יָלַד); “the mention of bearing children in the second line,” according to Meyers, “thus precludes a reference to childbirth in the first” (Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve*, 90). This is a perplexing statement, however, given that only a few paragraphs later Meyers argues that יָלַד in the second line does not refer to childbirth but to the status of parenthood (Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve*, 92). This conclusion seemingly invalidates her argument about parallelism, for if יָלַד in the second line refers to parenthood, then there would be no apparent problem with הָרוֹן in the first line referring to childbirth, as the two terms would not be “exact synonyms.” Even if one accepts Meyers’ assumption that parallel lines do not contain exact synonyms, Meyers’ argument that הָרוֹן cannot mean “childbirth” because of the parallelism is unconvincing, since in her own view the parallel would not be between exact synonyms but between “childbirth” and “becoming a parent.”

³⁶⁸ Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve*, 90. However, given that Meyers rejects the presence of hendiadys, it is not clear why she suggests that the first line would have to have the sense “painful pregnancy” rather than simply expressing two independent ideas: “pain and pregnancy.” If the two nouns are seen as distinct concepts syntactically, as they are by Meyers, who goes on to translate “your toil and your pregnancies,” then the noun הָרוֹן would seem to create no difficulty for translating the first term as “pain.” This point ultimately then does not provide as strong support for her argument—or against a physical pain interpretation—as Meyers seems to believe.

abandoned woman is ‘grieved in spirit.’”³⁶⁹ Second, Meyers considers other nouns from the same root and concludes that “four of these nouns represent either *mental anguish* (as does the verb) or *physical toil*, but not both. The fifth [עָצַב] apparently can denote either. None, with the dubious exception of the suffering of Jabez’s mother, refers specifically to physical pain.”³⁷⁰ Third, Meyers appeals to the LXX, which renders both עָצַבֹּן and עָצַב with λύπη, “a Greek word that can refer to mental anguish as well as bodily distress, rather than with one of the two Greek terms associated specifically with childbirth pain.”³⁷¹ One might expect Meyers, like Curley and Peterson and others, to then conclude that the terms in Gen 3:16 describe mental anguish. But unlike proponents of the emotional view, Meyers does not limit her investigation of the lexical evidence to a study of the “root” alone.

This leads to her fourth point: after arguing that the meaning of עָצַבֹּן is clearly not childbirth pain, Meyers then turns to look at the other two occurrences of עָצַבֹּן in the OT—a move that provides perhaps the strongest point of evidence for her interpretation. In Gen 3:17, Meyers suggests, the noun עָצַבֹּן clearly means “toil”: “God tells the man that growing crops will involve *‘iṣṣābôn*, ‘toil.’” This conclusion is confirmed, for Meyers, in the third occurrence: “that [עָצַבֹּן in Gen 3:17] refers to exhausting physical labor and not simply ‘difficulty’ seems certain in light of its third usage, Genesis 5:29,

³⁶⁹ Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve*, 90.

³⁷⁰ Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve*, 91. Meyers here mentions in passing the possibility that “the two concepts—anguish and toil—perhaps come from different roots” (91). Alternatively, she posits, “they may be semantically connected because onerous physical toil of the kind necessitated by ancient Israel’s environment all too often caused frustration and anxiety, that is, mental anguish” (91).

³⁷¹ Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve*, 91.

which refers obliquely to the Eden story.”³⁷² According to Meyers, this verse describes Noah as one who will offer comfort to people who are burdened with work and toil because of the cursed ground. Here, Meyers argues, “the word ‘toil’ [עֲצָבוֹן] breaks up a common biblical phrase, ‘work of the hands,’ with ‘work’ meaning agrarian labor.”³⁷³ Meyers then concludes, on the basis of these other occurrences where עֲצָבוֹן means “‘toil’—not ‘pain’ and not simply ‘work’”—that the עֲצָבוֹן decreed for the woman in 3:16a “similarly denotes *exhausting* physical labor.”³⁷⁴

A key point in Meyers’ argument is her rejection of a hendiadys in the phrase עֲצָבוֹנְךָ וְהַרְבֵּה. Meyers claims that “hendiadys is not necessary here” and notes in support that “the oldest translations do not understand hendiadys but rather reflect straightforward grammar—two objects of the double verb.”³⁷⁵ Meyers thus views עֲצָבוֹן and הַרְבֵּה—toil and pregnancies—as two independent concepts that are objects of the verbal phrase הַרְבֵּה אֶרְבֶּךָ. This leads to her translation “I will make great your toil and many your pregnancies,”³⁷⁶ which she suggests means that “women out of Eden will work hard and also have many pregnancies. God is mandating women’s role in production and reproduction.”³⁷⁷ This interpretation, Meyers argues, is supported by the Vulgate, *multiplicabo ærumnas tuas, et conceptus tuos*, which she translates “I will multiply your

³⁷² Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve*, 91.

³⁷³ Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve*, 91.

³⁷⁴ Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve*, 91.

³⁷⁵ Meyers, “Genesis 3:16,” 4. The “oldest translations” that she mentions in support are the LXX and the Vulgate, as well as the earliest English translations, the Wycliffe Bible and KJV.

³⁷⁶ Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve*, 102.

³⁷⁷ Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve*, 91.

toils and your conceptions.”³⁷⁸ Interpreting in light of the ancient context in which she supposes this text arose—the Israelite community during the Iron Age—Meyers notes that “these are precisely the two features that characterize women’s life in Iron Age agrarian households—the economic role, production, and the demographic one, reproduction.”³⁷⁹ In Gen 3:16a, Meyers writes, “God decrees what will be the reality of the target audience, Iron Age Israelites.”³⁸⁰ The passage “sets forth the woman’s enlarged role in the productive, agrarian tasks of society” while also mandating “an increased procreative role.”³⁸¹

While Meyers’ assessment of the first line (הַרְבָּה אֲרֻבָּה עֲצָבוֹנָךְ וְהָרְבִיתְךָ) remains the same across her publications, she modifies her interpretation of the second line of Gen 3:16 (בְּעֲצָב תֵּלְדִי בָנִים) in her more recent works. As noted above, Meyers suggests that the term יָלַד here means “to become a parent” rather than specifically “to give birth”; the line thus speaks, according to Meyers, not of childbirth but of the status of parenthood more generally.³⁸² While acknowledging that עָצַב is capable of meaning either physical toil or emotional anguish, Meyers concludes in her earlier publications that in Gen 3:16, “the meaning of the physical phenomenon of work is clear on the basis of its parallelism with *iššabon*, ‘toil.’”³⁸³ However, Meyers quickly adds here that עָצַב “is more than a

³⁷⁸ Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve*, 91.

³⁷⁹ Meyers, “Genesis 3:16,” 4. See further discussion below.

³⁸⁰ Meyers, “Genesis 3:16,” 4.

³⁸¹ Meyers, *Discovering Eve*, 105.

³⁸² Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve*, 92; Meyers, *Discovering Eve*, 106.

³⁸³ Meyers, *Discovering Eve*, 107. See also Meyers, “Gender Roles,” 345; Meyers, “עָצַב,” *TDOT* 11:280 (2001, original German published 1989).

synonym” of עֲצָבֹן. “Surely,” she writes, “the meaning of emotional distress is also present, and there is no reason to suppose that both nuances are not present.”³⁸⁴ In other words, while Meyers here leans towards interpreting עֲצָב as “toil” in Gen 3:16 because of the parallelism with עֲצָבֹן, she suggests that עֲצָב could simultaneously also mean emotional turmoil, thus indicating the “psychological toll” of the physical toil.³⁸⁵

By her 2013 revision, however, while still viewing these terms as related, Meyers had shifted to understanding עֲצָבֹן as “toil” and עֲצָב as “emotional anguish.” Here, she again appeals to parallelism but comes to a different conclusion, noting that “because words in parallel poetic lines are usually not synonymous,” עֲצָב “likely signifies mental anguish rather than toil.”³⁸⁶ However, she again accepts that the noun עֲצָב could mean either mental anguish or physical toil and remains open to the idea that both nuances are present in this occurrence of עֲצָב: “because the semantic range” of עֲצָב “includes toil, it may simultaneously express that notion too.”³⁸⁷ To convey both possible meanings, Meyers thus translates עֲצָב as “hardship.” In her latest publication, while her conclusions about עֲצָבֹן remain the same, Meyers takes a further step in the emotional direction in her interpretation of עֲצָב when she suggests that this term “means mental anguish or suffering (e.g., Prov 10:10; Ps 16:4) and is likely from a separate root (as in Arabic) with the same

³⁸⁴ Meyers, *Discovering Eve*, 107. Meyers suggests that both nuances are similarly present in “Isaiah 14:3, where the prophet looks forward to the day when God will provide ‘rest’ from three things: ‘hard work,’ ‘turmoil,’ and ‘*ešeb*, which has aspects of both the previous two” (107–8).

³⁸⁵ Meyers, *Discovering Eve*, 108.

³⁸⁶ Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve*, 92.

³⁸⁷ Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve*, 92.

three letters (‘šb) as the root of ‘iṣṣābôn.’³⁸⁸ Meyers’ progression of thought can be summarized in the table below.

Table 1. Summary of Shifts in Carol Meyers’ Interpretation

Year	Translation	Explanation
1983	“I will greatly increase your work and your pregnancies; (along) with toil you shall give birth to children.”	Both terms mean hard work/toil.
1988	“I will greatly increase your toil and your pregnancies; (along) with travail shall you beget children.”	עֲצָבוֹן means toil. עֲצָב can mean physical toil or emotional distress; here it probably means toil, but it could mean both.
2013	“I will make great your toil and many your pregnancies; with hardship shall you have children.”	עֲצָבוֹן means toil. עֲצָב could mean work or mental anguish; here it probably means mental anguish, but it could mean both.
2024	“I will make great/many your work and your pregnancies; with anguish shall you have children.”	עֲצָבוֹן and עֲצָב are from distinct roots. עֲצָבוֹן means toil, while עֲצָב means mental anguish or suffering.

In all of her publications, Meyers’ argument depends heavily on her assumptions regarding the context of Gen 3:16—particularly the ancient cultural context of its purported audience. According to Meyers, the target audience to whom this text was written was the people of Israel in the Iron Age. Though as many as 90% of ancient Israelites were agrarians, Meyers notes, “working the land was not easy,” as “most Israelite settlements were located in the highlands of the southern Levant, which posed

³⁸⁸ Meyers, “Genesis 3:16,” 4. Meyers had previously hinted at the possibility of two distinct roots (Meyers, *Discovering Eve*, 107; Meyers, “עֲצָב,” 11:278–79; Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve*, 91), but only here does she actually claim that the nouns in Gen 3:16 are from separate roots. For this proposal, see also Scharbert, who posits three homonymous roots with the letters עֲצָב: I with a verbal sense related to emotional pain, from which the nouns עֲצָבָה (seelische Wunde, Kummer, Herzeleid), עֲצָב (Schmerz), and מְעֲצָבָה (Qual) derive; עֲצָב II with the verbal sense “shape, fashion” (piel); and עֲצָב III, which Scharbert suggests stands semantically in between the two. Along with positing the verbal meanings “sich abmühen” (niph) and “Unannehmlichkeiten bereiten” (piel), Scharbert attributes three derived nouns to this third root: עֲצָב (harte Arbeit, Mühsal), עֲצָבָה (Beschwerden), עֲצָבוֹן (Mühsal, Beschwerden), and עֲצָבָה (Schwerarbeiter, Tagelöhner) (Scharbert, *Schmerz*, 31).

numerous challenges to agricultural productivity.”³⁸⁹ Such challenges included water shortages and factors that impaired the soil’s fertility, as well as droughts, locust swarms, and damaging hailstorms. These “environmental problems made life difficult for men and also women,” for, according to Meyers, in this ancient context, women “shared the many and often onerous activities necessary for producing food and other commodities in agrarian households.”³⁹⁰ In addition to their participation in the agricultural work, women also bore children. But this reproductive role, says Meyers, was also “fraught with problems,”³⁹¹ as death during childbirth was common for women and the infant mortality rate was high. In order to have sufficient labor for her family, “multiple pregnancies were necessary for most women.”³⁹² Thus, she concludes, most Israelites during the Iron Age period—the presumed “target audience” of this text—dealt with “considerable agricultural and demographic constraints.”³⁹³

For this purported audience, Meyers suggests, Gen 3:16 served an etiological purpose, explaining why women in this period had to deal with such constraints. In terms of the narrative context, Meyers views Gen 3:14–19 as part of a mythic Eden tale that “provides an *etiology*—an ‘explanation’—of how things came to be the way they are.” “Specifically,” Meyers suggests, “this etiological myth ‘explains’ why the Israelites

³⁸⁹ Meyers, “Genesis 3:16,” 1.

³⁹⁰ Meyers, “Genesis 3:16,” 2.

³⁹¹ Meyers, “Genesis 3:16,” 2.

³⁹² Meyers, “Genesis 3:16,” 2.

³⁹³ Meyers, “Genesis 3:16,” 2.

struggled agriculturally.”³⁹⁴ For Meyers, the events depicted in Gen 3 are “mythic” events, made up to account for “the difficulties of Israelite reality, such as mortality and the real-world roles of women and men.”³⁹⁵ When they read Gen 3:16, Meyers suggests, the target audience “would have understood that the existential reality for women—arduous household labor along with bearing multiple children—was divinely mandated.”³⁹⁶

Though her conclusions have not been widely adopted in modern commentaries or Bible translations, Meyers’ proposal has nevertheless significantly shaped the scholarly discussion of Gen 3:16 in the decades since the publication of her book *Discovering Eve* in 1988. As noted above, many of her arguments have been picked up by those arguing for non-traditional interpretations of Gen 3:16. Others have adopted her proposal to varying degrees, such as Jacques van Ruiten, who follows Meyers’ interpretation of 3:16a but seems to be less convinced by her reading of 3:16b.³⁹⁷ Specifically, van Ruiten does not fully agree with Meyers’ “interpretation of לָלֶדֶת and the differences she makes between the transitive and the intransitive use of it.”³⁹⁸ He notes that “the verb לָלֶדֶת seems to concern the process of childbirth itself.”³⁹⁹ Thus, while he maintains, following Meyers’ earlier works, that עָצָר is related to toil or work, van Ruiten

³⁹⁴ Meyers, “Genesis 3:16,” 2.

³⁹⁵ Meyers, “Genesis 3:16,” 2.

³⁹⁶ Meyers, “Genesis 3:16,” 6.

³⁹⁷ Van Ruiten, 5. Fretheim, in his commentary on Genesis, seems at least somewhat open to Meyers’ interpretation, though he notes that “this view has not been fully tested” (Terrence E. Fretheim, “Genesis,” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck, [Nashville: Abingdon, 1994], 1:363).

³⁹⁸ Van Ruiten, 6n12.

³⁹⁹ Van Ruiten, 5.

seems to allow the possibility that the second line does in fact describe childbirth. Van Ruiten concludes that “one might argue that Gen 3:16a speaks in the first line (v. 16ab) about hard and unpleasant work, possibly with painful aspects, and about pregnancy. The second line (v. 16ag) also speaks about this hard and unpleasant work, and possibly about childbirth.”⁴⁰⁰ Eskenazi comes to a similar conclusion as Meyers regarding this verse. Like Meyers, she translates “your toil and your pregnancies” and notes that “in ancient Israel women regularly worked long hours—in food preparation and storage, in the manufacture of clothing, in farming alongside of men, and more. For the Torah's original audience, this story would have brought such labors readily to mind.”⁴⁰¹

Strengths

Meyers’ argument has a number of strengths. Like proponents of an emotional view, Meyers rightly recognizes that עֲצַב does not typically mean “physical pain” and הָרִוּן does not mean “childbirth.” Unlike those who propose an emotional view of Gen 3:16—and many who hold to the traditional view—Meyers does in fact attempt to ground her reading of Gen 3:16 in a closer examination of the nouns that occur in this passage.⁴⁰² A primary strength of Meyers’ approach is her attention to the other occurrences of עֲצָבוֹן and עֲצָב. Meyers does not simply look at the meaning of the “root,” but at the meaning of the particular nouns in question. In other words, her argument is based on attention to the semantics of actual usage, rather than etymology. Rather than importing a conclusion

⁴⁰⁰ Van Ruiten, 5.

⁴⁰¹ Tamara Cohn Eskenazi, “Genesis,” in *The Torah: A Woman’s Commentary*, ed. Tamara Cohn Eskenazi and Andrea L. Weiss (New York: URJ Press and Women of Reform Judaism, 2008).

⁴⁰² This is at least the case in her latest works (*Rediscovering Eve* and “Genesis 3:16”).

about the meaning of עֲצָבוֹן in Gen 3:16 into the other occurrences of the noun, as Curley and Peterson do, Meyers takes all uses of the noun into consideration in order to define the debated usage in Gen 3:16. This is a methodologically sound approach and is particularly appropriate given that one of the other uses of עֲצָבוֹן is found in the immediate context (3:17).

Weaknesses

However, while Meyers' approach has certain strengths, particularly when compared with the emotional interpretation, it also has a number of weaknesses. Meyers' critiques of the physical interpretation display the same weaknesses as the critiques leveled by those holding to an emotional view—confusion of sense and referent and a questionable appeal to the absence of any typical terms for childbirth pain. Additionally, there are a number of weaknesses in the arguments Meyers and others following her make to support the proposal that Gen 3:16 describes arduous physical toil or labor.

First, in support of a non-childbirth pain interpretation, Meyers and van Ruiten each appeal to the Septuagint, which renders both עֲצָבוֹן and עָצַב with λύπη “a Greek word that can refer to mental anguish as well as bodily distress, rather than with one of the two Greek terms associated specifically with childbirth pain.”⁴⁰³ Van Ruiten, who suggests λύπη has the sense “sorrow, grief, affliction,” notes that “this word has a more general meaning and does not contain a specific reference to childbirth or pregnancy.”⁴⁰⁴ He adds that “the same applies to the second word στεναγμός” that apparently translates הָרוֹן,

⁴⁰³ Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve*, 91.

⁴⁰⁴ Van Ruiten, 12–13.

“which means something like ‘sighing, groan,’ but which is quite general in meaning and not related specifically to childbirth.”⁴⁰⁵ Van Ruiten thus concludes that “the toilsome and painful aspects” of Gen 3:16 in the LXX “seem not to be related specifically to childbirth. It seems as if the life of sadness is made to contrast with the paradisiacal life inside Eden.”⁴⁰⁶ What both Meyers and van Ruiten fail to mention, however, is that in the second line of Gen 3:16, the LXX does in fact use a term associated with childbirth (τίκτω, “bring forth”).⁴⁰⁷ While it is true that a typical Greek term for “childbirth pain” is not used here (just as the typical Hebrew terms for childbirth pain are not used), the use of τίκτω indicates that the LXX does still see in Gen 3:16 a description of some type of pain (λύπη) that is related to childbirth. Thus, the LXX does not provide conclusive evidence that there is no reference to childbirth pain in this verse, as Meyers and van Ruiten seem to claim.

Second, the lexical discussion in Meyers’ early works is messy, and while her later writings certainly present a cleaned-up version of this analysis, they are nevertheless not entirely free from difficulty. In *Discovering Eve* (1988), Meyers seems to treat multiple distinct nouns as if they were the same form. While purportedly “examining other biblical usages of the word עֶצֶב” to determine its semantic range, she includes in her examination other nouns from the root. Meyers writes that עֶצֶב is “found in fewer than ten other passages,” but some of the “usages” she points to are actually occurrences of the nouns עֶצֶב (Isa 58:3) and עֶצֶב (1 Chron 4:9; Ps 139:24; Isa 14:3) rather than עֶצֶב, which

⁴⁰⁵ Van Ruiten, 13.

⁴⁰⁶ Van Ruiten, 13.

⁴⁰⁷ LEH, s.v. “τίκτω.”

occurs only six times in the OT.⁴⁰⁸ Her 2013 book seems to correct this issue, as she here evaluates all of the nouns from the root individually. However, she again commits a similar error in her most recent publication. Here, Meyers states that the noun עֲצָב, which she proposes is from a separate root (עֲצַב II), occurs seven total times in the OT and “means mental anguish or suffering,”⁴⁰⁹ referencing two examples in support: Prov 10:10 and Ps 16:4. However, these two passages actually use not עֲצָב but עֲצָבָה, a noun that occurs five times in the OT. One then wonders which other four occurrences Meyers has in mind, and whether any of them are in fact occurrences of the form in question (עֲצָב), which occurs six times in the OT and frequently has the sense “toil.”⁴¹⁰ In short, the lexical analysis here remains problematic.

A third weakness of Meyers’ position is that it seems to rely heavily on her assumptions regarding the ancient historical and literary contexts. Not only is her reconstruction of the original audience debatable, but it is also questionable whether some of the claims Meyers makes about this purported Iron Age context are in fact accurate. Specifically, it is not clear that, at any point in ancient Israel, women played as significant a role in agricultural production as Meyers seems to assume. As John J. Collins concludes, “Meyers’s interpretation seems unduly dependent on her hypothesis

⁴⁰⁸ Meyers, *Discovering Eve*, 107.

⁴⁰⁹ Meyers, “Genesis 3:16,” 4.

⁴¹⁰ Another issue with her argument here is that, to establish the meaning of the noun עֲצָב as “mental anguish,” Meyers seems to appeal to the meaning of the verb to support her interpretation of the noun, noting that “in its verbal form, this root appears fifteen times in the Hebrew Bible and always denotes emotional or mental stress—not bodily pain” (“Genesis 3:16,” 7n18); that is, like proponents of the emotional approach discussed above, Meyers here commits the root fallacy.

that the story reflects life in the highland settlements.”⁴¹¹ Unfortunately, this is not the place for an in-depth examination or evaluation of Meyers’ claims regarding the historical background of this text, since the main concern of this thesis is with lexical matters. However, the fact that other scholars have raised concerns about Meyers’ reconstruction of the historical context suggests there is at least some reason for skepticism regarding her conclusion.

Fourth, even if Meyers’ assumptions regarding the ancient historical context are correct, it is questionable whether she adequately accounts for the unique linguistic context of Gen 3:16. While Meyers is probably correct to conclude that עֲצָבוֹן refers to agricultural labor in Gen 3:17 and 5:29, where עֲצָבוֹן occurs alongside other language associated with productive agricultural work, it is not clear that “economic” or “agricultural” work is as fitting in the context of Gen 3:16, where עֲצָבוֹן occurs alongside terms associated with childbearing. It is not entirely clear if Meyers is suggesting that “agricultural” is actually part of the sense of the word עֲצָבוֹן or simply assuming the referent in Gen 3:16 is the same as the referent in 3:17 and 5:29. Either way, Meyers’ conclusion that עֲצָבוֹן in Gen 3:16 describes agricultural labor seemingly requires her to import information from the contexts of these other two uses of עֲצָבוֹן into the context of Gen 3:16. In other words, “the value of the context,” that is, agricultural work, is “seen as something contributed by the word” עֲצָבוֹן in Gen 3:17 and 5:29, “and then it is read into the word as its contribution where the context is in fact different,” that is, Gen 3:16.⁴¹²

⁴¹¹ John J. Collins, *The Bible after Babel: Historical Criticism in a Postmodern Age* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 93n102. See also Novick, 240; Curley and Peterson, 163.

⁴¹² Barr, *Semantics*, 233. While Barr’s critique was specifically directed to the contributors to *TWNT* who were attempting to “relate the individual word directly to the theological thought,” it is also an appropriate

Simply because עֲצָבוֹן can be used in reference to agricultural labor in certain contexts does not mean that “agricultural” is part of its semantic contribution in all of its occurrences. Meyers seems to overestimate the semantic contribution of עֲצָבוֹן and fails to account for the unique context of Gen 3:16. While a reference to agricultural work seems fitting in Gen 3:17 and 5:29, in the context of Gen 3:16, where עֲצָבוֹן occurs with terms for childbearing rather than with language of physical labor, such a reference seems to be out of place.⁴¹³ While Meyers’ attention to the actual usage of עֲצָבוֹן is commendable, she ultimately fails to adequately take into account the specific context of Gen 3:16 and the various ways in which it differs from the context in Gen 3:17 and 5:29.

In sum, while Meyers’ proposal in some ways does a better job of resolving the difficulties with a traditional interpretation, her arguments are not without their own problems. Ultimately, while making some helpful points, Meyers fails to provide an adequate alternative to the physical birth pain interpretation.

An Alternative Proposal

While there are difficulties with the traditional understanding of Gen 3:16, the proposed alternatives discussed above also have a number of deficiencies, particularly in their engagement with the lexical data and treatment of the context. In light of these issues, I will now attempt to offer an interpretation of Gen 3:16, drawing on the lexical

critique of the general failure to appropriately distinguish between symbol (word), sense (meaning), and referent (extralinguistic thing) seen in Meyers and others.

⁴¹³ To use the language of Joos’ rule of maximum redundancy, in Gen 3:16, “agricultural labor” is probably not the meaning that “least disturbs” the context. See further discussion below.

semantic analysis and lexical field analysis above, that I believe better accounts for the lexical evidence and the immediate context.⁴¹⁴

Semantics

As noted above, one of the main deficiencies with the emotional view is the tendency to assume that the meaning of the “root” is the meaning of the noun עֶצְבוֹן (and, in some cases, עֶצָב). Many proponents of this interpretation fail to actually examine the use of these specific nouns elsewhere, or do so only after having reached their conclusion about Gen 3:16.⁴¹⁵ In other words, this approach is characterized by an “excessive reliance on the root of Hebrew words.”⁴¹⁶ While considering related nouns and verbs can be a useful step in the process, it is best to begin lexical semantic study by looking at all of the uses of the word in question to determine its semantic range. In general, when determining the meaning of a particular word, the actual usage of the same word elsewhere should hold more weight than possible etymological relations, for “etymology is not, and does not profess to be, a guide to the semantic value of words in their current usage, and such value has to be determined from the current usage and not from the

⁴¹⁴ In doing so, I do not purport to have developed an entirely novel interpretation, as there will be points of overlap with the other views and ultimately the conclusion regarding the referent is not radically different from some of the proposals discussed above. However, I hope to correct some of the lexicographical errors made by proponents of the three views discussed above and thus reach a conclusion in a way that better accounts for the lexical data. I also recognize that this proposal is likely not without its own weaknesses, particularly given that there are many interpretive issues that I am unable to address here due to the limitations of this thesis (see n. 268 above).

⁴¹⁵ It is probably safe to say that the same critique could be leveled of the physical pain view, but proponents of this view often seem to simply state their conclusion as a fact, rather than attempt to explain or argue for this point, so it is not always clear whether they have in fact looked at the lexemes more carefully.

⁴¹⁶ Barr, *Semantics*, 101.

derivation.”⁴¹⁷ We will thus begin by considering what the use of these terms elsewhere can tell us about their meaning in Gen 3:16. While עֲצָבוֹן and עָצַב have already been discussed briefly in Chapter 2, a few additional points can be made here.

Usage of עֲצָבוֹן Elsewhere

A number of proposed meanings for עֲצָבוֹן have been discussed above, including “(physical) pain,” “sorrow,” “toil (generally),” and “(agricultural) toil.” Given that the term עֲצָבוֹן appears only three times in the OT, the data that can be used to understand its meaning—and to determine whether it has a range of meaning (“toil” and “pain”) or a single sense (“toil/painful toil”)—is limited. In light of this limited evidence, it will be helpful to employ Joos’ principle of maximum redundancy, which states that the “best meaning is the least meaning,” the one that contributes “*least to the total message derivable from the passage where it is at home.*”⁴¹⁸

עֲצָבוֹן in Genesis 5:29

In Gen 5:29,⁴¹⁹ עֲצָבוֹן seems to mean something like “toil” or “labor.” One reason for this suggestion is the syntactical combination of עֲצָבוֹן with מַעֲשֵׂה, “work,” in the phrase וְיָנַח מִנוּ מִמַּעֲשֵׂנוּ וּמִמַּעֲצָבוֹן יָדֵינוּ “this one will give us comfort from our work and from the עֲצָבוֹן of our hands.” While these terms may not be exact synonyms, at the very least,

⁴¹⁷ Barr, *Semantics*, 107.

⁴¹⁸ Joos, 257 (emphasis original). This principle, Joos suggests, is “the explicator’s and the defining lexicographer’s rule of thumb for deciding what a hapax legomenon”—or, in our case, a very rare word—“most probably means.”

⁴¹⁹ Genesis 5:29: וַיִּקְרָא אֶת־שְׁמוֹ נֹחַ לֵאמֹר זֶה יָנַח מִנוּ מִמַּעֲשֵׂנוּ וּמִמַּעֲצָבוֹן יָדֵינוּ מִן־הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר אָרְרָהּ יְהוָה: “And he called his name Noah, saying, ‘This one will give us comfort from our work and from the עֲצָבוֹן of our hands, from the ground which Yahweh cursed.’”

they are probably co-referential—that is, they refer to the same thing. The minimum semantic content that would allow these two terms to be used as co-referential is probably some notion of work. While both terms can perhaps be used in reference to agricultural work, it is not necessarily the case that this is part of their sense, as Meyers at times seems to suggest. Thus, the usage alongside this term for “work” (מַעֲשֵׂה) makes it reasonable to suggest that that עֲצָבוֹן here is another word for work or labor.

The occurrence of עֲצָבוֹן in construct with יָדָיו provides further evidence for this conclusion. This construct phrase, וּמַעֲצָבוֹן יָדָיו “the עֲצָבוֹן of our hands,” indicates that the word עֲצָבוֹן can be used of something related to or done with the hands.⁴²⁰ The use of עֲצָבוֹן in the construct phrase should probably incline us away from understanding עֲצָבוֹן as having the sense “pain,” at least in this context. If nothing else, the construct phrase, as well as the parallel מַעֲשֵׂה, seem to provide evidence against a purely emotional interpretation of the noun עֲצָבוֹן. While it is not entirely clear what the specific meaning of עֲצָבוֹן is here, the fact that עֲצָבוֹן is something from which a person needs “comfort” (נַחַם, piel) would predispose us to see עֲצָבוֹן as a less than positive term.⁴²¹ Work itself is not necessarily something that one needs comfort from, so the occurrence of עֲצָבוֹן as the object of נַחַם implies that there is something negative about this type of work. Following

⁴²⁰ The similar phrase מַעֲשֵׂה יָדָי “the work of your hands” occurs often in the OT; in Deuteronomy, the phrase frequently refers explicitly to agricultural labor (Deut 16:15; 24:19; 28:12).

⁴²¹ There is “incongruity between the etymology of the name ‘Noah’” (נֹחַ), which is related to נָחַח, “to rest,” and the explanation of the name given by Lamech, “‘comfort’” (יְנַחֵמְנִי), which is related to נַחַם, “to comfort, console” (piel) (Mathews, 316). The LXX attempted to resolve the perceived difficulty with the reading οὗτος διαναπαύσει ἡμᾶς, apparently assuming יְנַחֵמְנִי “he will give us rest.” However, the ambiguity is probably best explained as a play on words. The name נֹחַ sounds similar to נַחַם, with both having the letters נ and ח, and the explanation (יְנַחֵמְנִי) thus probably serves as an intentional play on these sounds rather than a precise etymology (see discussion in Mathews, 317; Hamilton, *Genesis 1–17*, 258–59). Further, this verse probably “anticipates the recurring plays on the name ‘Noah’ in the following flood narrative,” where נֹחַ and נַחַם “often arise” (Mathews, 317).

Joos’ rule of maximum redundancy, the meaning that “contributes least to the total context”⁴²² here is probably “toil” or “painful toil,” that is, some kind of difficult or painful work.

In Gen 5:29, we see a clear reference to Gen 3:17, the other passage where עֲצָבוֹן occurs.

עֲצָבוֹן in Genesis 3:17

In Gen 3:17, עֲצָבוֹן appears in the curse that the Lord pronounces to Adam on account of Adam’s disobedience in listening to his wife and eating of the tree: אָרְוָהּ עֲצָבוֹן “Cursed is the ground because of you; in/with עֲצָבוֹן you will eat of it all the days of your life.” There are two phrases here that are clearly echoed in Gen 5:29:

Genesis 3:17	Genesis 5:29
אָרְוָהּ הָאֲדָמָה “Cursed is the ground”	מִן־הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר אָרְוָהּ יְהוָה “From the ground which Yahweh cursed” ⁴²³

⁴²² Eugene A. Nida, “Implications of Contemporary Linguistics for Biblical Scholarship,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 91, no. 1 (1972): 86.

⁴²³ There are various possible interpretations of this phrase within the verse that have been proposed. The Hebrew reads וַיִּקְרָא אֶת־שְׁמוֹ נֹחַ לְאָמֵר זֶה יַנְחֵמֵנוּ מִמַּעַשְׁנוֹ וּמִעֲצָבוֹן וְיָבִיאוּ מִן־הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר אָרְוָהּ יְהוָה. Some take the phrase מִן־הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר אָרְוָהּ יְהוָה as describing the source of the “comfort” that Noah will bring, seeing here a reference to “Noah’s discovery of viticulture as ‘relief’ from the curse....If so, Noah’s vineyard would evidence a covenant reprieve from the Edenic curse of the ground, interpreting the Lord’s promise in 8:21–22 as its repeal” (Mathews, 318); this approach appears to be that taken by NJPS: “And he named him Noah, saying, ‘This one will provide us relief from our work and from the toil of our hands, out of the very soil which the Lord placed under a curse’”). The “difficulty with this interpretation,” as Mathews notes, “lies in the absence of such a respite after the flood” (318). An alternative interpretation is found in the ESV: “Rather than understanding the phrase as referring to the relief Noah would provide from the difficult labor caused by the curse on the ground,” the ESV takes the final phrase יְהוָה אָרְוָהּ אֲשֶׁר אָרְוָהּ and “makes it an initial clause, so that now it is Noah who is taken from the cursed ground, like Adam” (Iain M. Duguid, “Genesis,” in *ESV Expository Commentary*, ed. Iain M. Duguid, James M. Hamilton Jr., and Jay Sklar, vol. 1, *Genesis–Numbers* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2025], 84n95). Because of the position of the clause in the Hebrew, however, this interpretation, while possible, does not seem to be the most straightforward reading. Perhaps a better explanation is to take מִן as causal (“caused by the ground”) and read this phrase as referring to the source of the “painful toil” (עֲצָבוֹן): “He named him Noah and said, ‘He

בְּעֲצָבוֹן תֹּאכַל לֶחֶם “In/with/by toil you will eat of it”	זֶה יָבִיאוּנוּ מְנוּחָה...מֵעֲצָבוֹן יְדֵינוּ “This one will bring us comfort...from the toil of our hands”
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Given these parallels and the similarity of the two contexts, it is probably best to understand the term עֲצָבוֹן in both Gen 3:17 and 5:29 as having essentially the same sense, which in both contexts seems to be “toil.”

This is further supported by the verses following Gen 3:17, which describe difficulties introduced into the man’s task of working (עָבַד) and keeping (שָׁמַר) the ground (Gen 2:15, 5): “And thorns and thistles [the ground] will cause to grow for you, and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face, you shall eat bread, until you return to the ground, for from it you were taken, and you are dust, and to dust you will return” (3:18–19). According to these verses, the cursed ground will now produce thorns and thistles, complicating the man’s task of working the land and producing food from it. עֲצָבוֹן appears to be another way of describing this difficult work. A parallel between 3:17 and 3:19, which both feature a clause using the verb אָכַל modified by a prepositional phrase using בְּ, also likely provides evidence for reading עֲצָבוֹן as a description of difficult work:

Genesis 3:17	Genesis 3:19
בְּעֲצָבוֹן תֹּאכַל לֶחֶם “In/with/by עֲצָבוֹן you will eat [of] it [the ground]”	בְּזֵיעַת אַפֶּיךָ תֹּאכַל לֶחֶם “By the sweat of your face you will eat food/bread”

The syntactical parallel suggests there may be some kind of semantic similarity between these expressions. The phrase “by the sweat of your face” has generally been understood

will comfort us in the labor and painful toil of our hands caused by the ground the LORD has cursed” (NIV; see also NET; NASB; Mathews, 318).

as describing physical exertion—sweat produced due to difficult physical labor.⁴²⁴ It seems likely that the parallel *בְּעִצְבוֹן* is simply another way of describing this strenuous physical labor. The task of producing food from the ground will become more difficult because it will now be done *בְּעִצְבוֹן* and *בְּזַעַת אֶפְיָהּ*. *בְּעִצְבוֹן* thus seems to describe some kind

⁴²⁴ An NET footnote, for example, reads, “the expression ‘the sweat of your brow’ is a metonymy, the sweat being the result of painful toil in the fields.” See also Davidson, 45; John Goldingay, *Genesis*, BCOTP (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020), 81; Franz Delitzsch, *A New Commentary on Genesis*, trans. Sophia Taylor (New York: Scribner & Welford, 1889), 1:167; John Calvin, *A Commentary on Genesis*, trans. John King (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), 175. Daniel Fleming has suggested that “by the sweat of your face” actually refers not to sweat accompanying difficult physical labor but sweat “produced by anxious fear that harvests will fail, and the life-giving grain will not come” (Daniel E. Fleming, “By the Sweat of Your Brow: Adam, Anat, Athirat and Ashurbanipal,” in *Ugarit and the Bible: Proceedings of the International Symposium on Ugarit and the Bible*, ed. George J. Brooke, Adrian H.W. Curtis, and John F. Healey, [Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1994], 93). To arrive at this conclusion, Fleming appeals to other ancient Near Eastern literature regarding sweat. Ultimately, however, while Fleming’s suggestion is possible, there is limited evidence to support it. Fleming notes that the Akkadian cognate noun *zu tu* “occurs most often as a symptom of sickness or as a sign of recovery, especially in medical texts.” Additionally, in other texts, sweat is understood as an image of evil departing the body, and elsewhere, “horses sweat” (94). Out of a number of texts that mention sweat in ANE literature, Fleming finds only three texts relevant to his argument. In two Ugaritic texts, sweat is mentioned in a description of fear at the approach of visitors in the Baal myth. In one Akkadian text, sweat is a response of fear “in the midst of battle” (96). While Fleming’s suggestion is intriguing, it is somewhat unconvincing, as the scarcity of textual evidence does not foster much confidence in his claim that “sweat was particularly understood to be caused by anxious fear” by the ancients (97).

Further, even if this is one way in which sweat was understood in the ancient world, there is no evidence to suggest the mention of sweat should be understood in this way in Genesis 3, where the context is not particularly similar to that of the Baal myth nor the Akkadian battle scene. Fleming does return to Genesis to build his case, arguing that “Adam’s tending (*עבד*) of the garden” before this point “in fact require no such effort? Does only a higher degree of farming difficulty induce sweat?” (Fleming, 97). Fleming believes this particular consequence of Adam’s sin thus makes better sense if understood as sweat associated with fear. Fleming suggests that in Gen 3, man and woman “are introduced to fear” (97). In their eating of the tree, they leave their childlike state of being “exposed, vulnerable, but not abashed or humiliated” and “their eyes are opened so they know they are naked and want to cover themselves...for the first time, they are afraid, afraid of the very one who had shielded them from all fear” (98). However, while Fleming is right to note that the man and woman indeed become fearful in Gen 3 (see 3:10), he struggles to convincingly connect this experience of fear to 3:19, where “sweat” is mentioned not in relation to the man’s shame but in relation to the man’s producing food from the ground. In his conclusion, Fleming draws from curses in Deuteronomy to suggest that “farming for basic sustenance was a tenuous pursuit” because of the possibility of drought, blight, and other harmful things that could affect the land and its fruitfulness. Again, Fleming’s statement is probably not incorrect, but it is questionable whether this proves that “Gen 3:19 should resemble the texts regarding Anat, Athirat, and Ashurbanipal in attributing sweat to anxious fear” (100). Thus, it is probably best to reject Fleming’s proposal that sweat in Gen 3:19 refers to anxious fear.

of difficult work, here specifically in reference to the hardship of man’s working the ground to produce food.

The use in the context of this punishment clearly invites readers to view עֲצָבוֹן in a negative light. That is, the sense is probably not simply “work” or “labor,” but a negative type of labor. This is supported, as already noted, by the fact that עֲצָבוֹן is elsewhere something that people need “comfort” from. The question, then, is what is “negative” about this labor: Is it physically painful work? Is it work that is laden with anxiety? Is it work that causes emotional distress? While the specifics of what is negative are unclear, perhaps this aspect can be adequately represented in the English “toil” or more specifically “painful toil,” since the word “pain” can allow for both physical and emotional referents.⁴²⁵ While Meyers at times seems to view “agricultural” as something inherent to the meaning of עֲצָבוֹן, it seems that the minimum contribution of עֲצָבוֹן to this sentence—the “least meaning”—is simply “toil.” As Meyers herself even appears to recognize,⁴²⁶ it is the subsequent verses in the context that suggest עֲצָבוֹן is being used in reference to “agricultural labor.”

עֲצָבוֹן in Genesis 3:16

Based on the above uses of עֲצָבוֹן—one of which is in the very next verse and the other of which refers back to that verse—it seems plausible that the sense of עֲצָבוֹן in Gen

⁴²⁵ See further discussion in Conclusion.

⁴²⁶ Meyers seems to suggest at one point that the context of Gen 3:17 is what indicates a reference to agricultural work, when she writes that עֲצָבוֹן appears once in Gen 3:17, “addressed to the man, where it clearly means ‘toil’ in reference to post-Edenic agricultural labor as developed in the succeeding verses (3:18–19)” (Meyers, “Genesis 3:16,” 4). However, as noted above, she fails to take into account that the context of Gen 3:16 does not develop this reference to agricultural labor.

3:16 is again “painful toil.” This conclusion suggests that the critique often leveled against the traditional view—that the word עֲצָבוֹן does not specifically mean physical pain—is valid. However, the proposal here provides a better solution than the emotional approach because it adequately covers the data and it employs a more valid lexicographical approach, looking at the actual uses of the noun elsewhere. When these other uses are taken into consideration, it becomes clear that the sense of עֲצָבוֹן is not “sorrow” but “toil/painful toil.”

This conclusion also provides a better solution than Meyers, who seems to overload עֲצָבוֹן with meaning. Rather than seeking to identify the “least meaning” of this term, Meyers ends up importing the associations with agricultural labor from the contexts of Gen 3:17 and 5:29 into the usage of עֲצָבוֹן in Gen 3:16, assigning a greater meaning to the term than can be warranted. Meyers fails to adequately demonstrate that “agricultural” or “agrarian” is something inherent to the sense of the word עֲצָבוֹן rather than something contributed by the contexts in Gen 3:17 and 5:29. Due to the limited evidence available, it is difficult to know exactly what the semantic contribution of עֲצָבוֹן is. However, following Joos’ rule, in Gen 3:16, the meaning that “maximizes the redundancy of word and context together” and fits “in most smoothly without jostling its neighbors”⁴²⁷ is not “economic labor” or “agricultural toil,” as Meyers would seem to suggest, but simply “toil.” While it is possible that the semantic contribution of the term עֲצָבוֹן could be more than “toil,” it seems that the “least meaning”—and thus the “best meaning”—in all three contexts in which עֲצָבוֹן occurs is simply “toil” or “painful toil.”

⁴²⁷ Joos, 257, 263.

Of course, it is possible that עֲצָבוֹן is polysemous and has a different sense here than in its other uses, such as “pain.”⁴²⁸ However, it would be difficult to make a convincing case for polysemy given the limited data available to us. Further, since the usage in Gen 3:16 is in such close proximity to the usage in 3:17, it seems best to understand both occurrences as having the same sense. It is probably simplest, then, to conclude that עֲצָבוֹן in Gen 3:16 has the same sense as in its other uses: “toil” or “painful toil.” This conclusion, however, does not necessarily mean that עֲצָבוֹן in Gen 3:16 refers to the same type of toil that it does elsewhere, as Meyers assumes.⁴²⁹

Usage of עֲצָב Elsewhere

The related noun עֲצָב appears six times in the OT, only one of which (Gen 3:16) is in the Pentateuch.

עֲצָב in Psalms and Proverbs

In three of its other occurrences, עֲצָב has the sense “toil” or perhaps “painful toil” (Ps 127:2; Prov 5:10; 14:23), while in a fourth, the sense seems to be “pain” or “hurt”: וְדַבַּר־לְעֲצָב “a word of hurt” or “a hurtful word” (Prov 15:1). In a fifth (Prov 10:22), עֲצָב could have the sense “pain/hurt,” but, as noted above, the sense here is probably “toil.” In four of its five other uses, then, the noun עֲצָב probably has the sense “toil.” However, the

⁴²⁸ Some lexica seem to take the noun עֲצָבוֹן as polysemous. *DCH* proposes multiple senses for עֲצָבוֹן, listing Gen 3:16 under “pain” and Gen 3:17 and 5:29 under “toil” (*DCH*, s.v. “עֲצָבוֹן”). *BDB* also lists these two senses but seemingly treats them as one category of meaning, putting all three occurrences under the heading “pain, toil” (*BDB*, s.v. “עֲצָבוֹן”). *HALOT* similarly groups all three passages under one category, offering the sense “anxious toil, hardship” for all three occurrences of the noun עֲצָבוֹן (*HALOT*, s.v. “עֲצָבוֹן”). *Ges*¹⁸ also treats the noun as polysemous, listing the sense “Mühsal, Beschwerneis (deine beschwerliche Schwangerschaft)” for Gen 3:16 and “Mühe, Schwerarbeit” for Gen 3:17 and 5:29 (*Ges*¹⁸, s.v. “עֲצָבוֹן”).

⁴²⁹ See further discussion below.

occurrence in Prov 15:1 with a different sense, “hurt,” demonstrates that the noun is likely polysemous.

עָצַב in Genesis 3:16

Thus, one must determine which of these two possible senses—“pain/hurt” or “toil”—best suits the context of Gen 3:16. While it may be tempting to conclude that both “pain” and “toil” are in view in Gen 3:16, as Meyers does, this conclusion should probably be avoided, as it involves the error Barr calls “illegitimate totality transfer.” Such an error occurs “when the ‘meaning’ of a word (understood as the total series of relations in which it is used in the literature) is read into a particular case as its sense and implication.”⁴³⁰ This is problematic because, as Nida has noted, “words do not carry with them all the meanings which they may have in other sets of co-occurrences.”⁴³¹ In other words, simply because a word has multiple possible senses does not mean that multiple senses are present in any one usage: “words signify only *one* meaning in each specific context in which they are used, except for rare instances where a speaker *purposely* intends a play on meanings.”⁴³² In Gen 3:16, it is not clear that the author intended such a play on meanings or wanted to communicate both ideas, nor is it clear that the audience would have assumed both senses of עָצַב were in view here, as Meyers seems to suggest.

⁴³⁰ Barr, *Semantics*, 218.

⁴³¹ Nida, 86. While at times it may be unclear to the audience which sense is in view, it is generally the case that in any given instance, the word carries with it only one of its possible senses, and that sense is generally clear based on the context of usage. Even in cases where there is ambiguity as to which sense is in view, the fact that either sense *could* fit the context does not indicate that the speaker intended to communicate both senses.

⁴³² J. P. Louw, *Semantics of New Testament Greek* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 36 (emphasis original).

While at times biblical authors may use intentional ambiguity for literary purposes, a word in any given usage “will *normally* only carry one of its possible senses, and that sense is the one determined by the linguistic and extra-linguistic context.”⁴³³

In the context of Gen 3:16, where עֲצָב occurs in parallel with עֲצָבוֹן, which, as discussed above, likely has the sense “toil,” it seems plausible that עֲצָב similarly denotes “toil” or “painful toil.” That these terms, עֲצָבוֹן and עֲצָב, should be understood as having a similar sense in this context is further supported by the fact that in the next verse a similar prepositional phrase occurs with the noun עֲצָבוֹן instead of עֲצָב. That is, the phrase בְּעֲצָב in Gen 3:16 finds a parallel in בְּעֲצָבוֹן in 3:17. The fact that both nouns are found in such similar clauses, both as the object of בְּ, in such close proximity thus provides further evidence that the two terms, עֲצָב and עֲצָבוֹן, are being used in a similar fashion and likely have a similar sense.

Context

As discussed above, in Gen 3:16a, the noun עֲצָבוֹן is used alongside הָרֶוֶן, a term meaning “pregnancy” or “conception.” These two nouns, both taking 2fs pronoun suffixes, function as two objects of the verbal phrase הָרֶוֶה אֶרְבָּה. While the placement of the two nouns side-by-side does not necessarily imply a connection between them—that is, while it is possible that עֲצָבוֹן “toil” and הָרֶוֶן “pregnancy” are two separate entities that the author had no intention of linking—there is reason in this case to believe a connection was intended. In Gen 3:16b, עֲצָב is more unambiguously linked with another term in the

⁴³³ Cotterell and Turner, 178.

semantic field of childbearing, occurring as the object of a preposition (בְּ)⁴³⁴ that directly modifies the verb יָלַד, “to bear, bring forth, give birth (to)”: בְּעֵצָב תֵּלְדִי בְנִים: “With/in עֵצָב you will give birth to children.”⁴³⁵ This linkage of עֵצָב with יָלַד suggests that likely there is also a connection implied between עֵצָבוֹן and הָרוֹן in the parallel first line. In other words, given the connection of עֵצָב with יָלַד in the second line of Gen 3:16, עֵצָבוֹן and הָרוֹן in the first line should probably be understood not as two unrelated concepts but as somehow connected to one another.

What, exactly, is the nature of this connection? As noted above, many scholars claim that עֵצָבוֹן וְהָרָגָה is a hendiadys, in which these two terms together express a single idea, such as “pain in childbirth”⁴³⁶ or “sorrowful conceptions.”⁴³⁷ Collins suggests that calling this a hendiadys is “imprecise.” According to Collins, “the phrase ‘and your pregnancy’ is best understood as an explicative *waw* (having the nuance ‘namely’), followed by an accusative of reference (‘with respect to your pregnancy’).”⁴³⁸ If this is

⁴³⁴ The preposition בְּ here probably designates accompaniment: “in/with עֵצָבוֹן.”

⁴³⁵ It is questionable whether Meyers’ claim—that “when the verb *yld* is intransitive, it normally denotes the birth process; but when it is used transitively, it refers to the status of parenthood” (*Discovering Eve*, 106)—is correct. While יָלַד in the qal can perhaps mean something like “to have children” more generally, rather than specifically designating the process of childbirth, it is unclear whether these senses are distinguished based on the transitive vs. intransitive syntax alone. The limitations of this study do not allow for an in-depth examination of this root, but based on an initial survey of the occurrences of יָלַד, it seems that Meyers probably draws too sharp of a distinction between the transitive and intransitive uses of the verb. There are cases where the intransitive usage would seem to have the sense “have children” more generally (e.g., Gen 6:4), as well as many instances where the transitive use could mean not simply “have children” but “give birth to” (e.g., Gen 4:1, 2; Exod 2:2, 22). Meyers does not consider whether there might be other syntactical features, aside from transitivity, that could indicate these different meanings. Meyers thus fails to convincingly demonstrate that the sense of the verb in Gen 3:16b is “become a parent/have children” rather than “bear, give birth.”

⁴³⁶ NASB; see discussion above.

⁴³⁷ Curley and Peterson, 165.

⁴³⁸ C. John Collins, “What Happened to Adam and Eve? A Literary-Theological Approach to Genesis,” *Presbyterian* 27, no. 1 (2001): 37n75. See also Cassuto, who notes that while this phrase is usually

the case, the line could be rendered something like “I will greatly increase your (painful) toil, namely, with respect to your pregnancy.”

As Collins goes on to note, this understanding “is clear from the clause that follows, which seems to restate the punishment” of the first clause.⁴³⁹ In the second clause, as noted above, עָצַב, a term related to עֲצָבוֹן, is explicitly linked with יָלַד. As is often the case in Hebrew poetry, these parallel lines are likely co-referential—that is, though the sense may not be exactly the same in each line (i.e., the lines are not synonymous), both lines refer to the same or similar thing, though in different ways.⁴⁴⁰ The second line restates the first, describing the same issue from a different angle, and could be rendered something like: “with (painful) toil you will bring forth children.” In sum, because parallel lines are co-referential, and because the referent of the second line is clearly painful toil related to childbearing, it is appropriate to understand the first line as having a similar referent—toil that is specifically associated with childbearing. In the first line, however, an earlier stage of the childbearing process seems to be in view, so that the two lines form a merism describing two ends of the reproductive process: from conception to birth. Thus, in this context, עֲצָבוֹן and עָצַב both seem to refer to painful toil associated with the childbearing process.

understood as a hendiadys, meaning “the suffering of your childbearing,” a “better interpretation is: *your suffering* in general, and more particularly that of *your childbearing*” (U. A. Cassuto, *Commentary on the Book of Genesis*, trans. Israel Abrahams [Skokie, IL: Varda Books, 1961], 165).

⁴³⁹ Collins, “What Happened to Adam and Eve?” 37n75.

⁴⁴⁰ In other words, in Hebrew parallelism, parallel terms—or parallel lines as a whole—often overlap not in sense but in reference, describing the same event or object from differing points of view. For example, in the verse, “keep your tongue from evil // and your lips from speaking deceit” (Ps 34:14[13]), there are no real synonyms in the sentence, but “both lines are about the same thing” (C. John Collins, “Verb Tenses in Biblical Hebrew Poetry: Psalms, Wisdom Books, Prophets,” class notes, Covenant Theological Seminary, St. Louis, MO, 2005). As alternate ways of describing the same thing (lying), these lines can thus be considered co-referential. Since the word “synonym” is generally used of words that overlap in their *sense*, it can thus be misleading to describe parallel lines, or parallel terms, as “synonymous.”

At the very least, the context of Gen 3:16, where עֲצָבוֹן and עֶצֶב are placed alongside הָרוֹן and יָלַד, indicates that עֲצָבוֹן and עֶצֶב here likely do not refer to agricultural labor, as Meyers proposes. Meyers is probably correct to find in Gen 3:17 and 5:29 a reference to agricultural labor, for, as the discussion above has demonstrated, the context in these passages clearly points to such a referent. When closer attention is given to the actual context of Gen 3:16, however, it becomes clear that the notion of agricultural work is not introduced until 3:17. Given the absence of terminology related to agricultural work in 3:16, and the presence of terminology related to childbearing, the context of Gen 3:16 would suggest that the referent is not the toil of agricultural work but toil associated with childbearing. In other words, the term עֲצָבוֹן, with the sense “painful toil,” is being applied in different referential contexts: in Gen 3:17 and 5:29, עֲצָבוֹן is associated with the production of food from the land, while in Gen 3:16, עֲצָבוֹן is associated with pregnancy or conception.

Close attention to the context of Gen 3:16—and the recognition that it is the context of Gen 3:16 that introduces the referent of childbirth—also resolves the objection, raised by critics of the traditional view, that עֲצָבוֹן and עֶצֶב are not elsewhere used of labor or childbirth pain. It is true that neither עֲצָבוֹן nor עֶצֶב are the usual terms for pain in childbirth, and it is true that neither of these terms are specifically used elsewhere in reference to childbearing, at least in the materials available to us. However, simply because these terms do not have the sense “labor pains” and are not used elsewhere in reference to bearing children does not preclude them from referring to some aspect of the childbearing process here. The reference to childbearing does not come from the terms עֲצָבוֹן and עֶצֶב but from other terms in the context, namely, הָרוֹן and יָלַד. Just as one would

not immediately associate the English word “pain” with the pains of childbirth unless it were found in the combination “labor pains,” or perhaps or if one were sitting in a hospital delivery room, so the combination of עֲצָבֹן and עֲצָב with הָרוֹן and יָלֵד is what indicates that the referent is specifically painful toil associated with childbearing. It is not necessary for עֲצָבֹן or עֲצָב themselves to mean “labor pains” in order for them to be used in reference to difficulties associated with childbearing. The connection of these nouns with childbearing does not come from the use of the nouns elsewhere or anything inherent in the nouns themselves but from the context.

Lexical Choice

While “toil” or “painful toil” was determined to be the most likely sense of עֲצָבֹן and עֲצָב based on the usage of these words elsewhere, a comparison with other terms from the semantic field can perhaps provide further specification of this sense, as meaning is often indicated by the choice of one word rather than another. A few comments can be made on the choice of עֲצָבֹן and עֲצָב based on the above analysis of the lexical field of “pain, pangs” found in *NIDOTTE*, in which עֲצָבֹן and עֲצָב are included. The fact that these terms were chosen rather than others from this semantic field sheds light on their meaning in Gen 3:16.

The choice of עֲצָבֹן and עֲצָב rather than another term from this semantic field suggests that perhaps “pain” is not the primary focus in Gen 3:16. If the author of Genesis had wanted to specifically communicate the notion of physical pain, perhaps מִכְאוֹב “pain” or a form of the verb כאב “to be in pain” would have been more appropriate than the narrower terms עֲצָבֹן and עֲצָב. The fact that a participle of כאב occurs in Gen 34:25, in a clear description of physical pain, indicates that this verb was available to the

author and that it likely could have been used here to convey the idea of physical pain associated with pregnancy or childbirth. A comparison with מְאֹב and כָּאֵב thus suggests that the semantic contribution of עֲצָבוֹן and עֲצָב is probably not simply “physical pain.” While the referent in Gen 3:16 could be physical pain,⁴⁴¹ the fact that עֲצָבוֹן and עֲצָב were chosen in this particular context rather than a term specifically having the sense “pain” such as כָּאֵב indicates that perhaps the author of Genesis did not want to characterize the difficulties of childbearing purely in terms of physical pain. Translating with an English term such as “pain,” while perhaps accurately communicating the referent, thus may not accurately capture the author’s rhetorical goals in his choice of the terms עֲצָבוֹן and עֲצָב to convey this negative aspect of childbearing.

If the author of Gen 3:16 had wanted to specifically convey the idea of emotional pain, there are again other terms that would be more suitable than עֲצָבוֹן and עֲצָב, including מְאֹב, עֲצָבָה, or a word not examined in this study, such as יָגוֹן (“grief”) or perhaps צָרָה (“distress”). While there may be an emotional nuance to עֲצָבוֹן and עֲצָב,⁴⁴² the fact that one of these other terms from the semantic field of grief is not used suggests that the negative aspect of childbearing is being depicted in Gen 3:16 as something other than simply “grief” or “sorrow.”

A comparison of עֲצָבוֹן and עֲצָב with other terms from the semantic field such as הָיִל, חָבַל, or צִיר can also provide insight into the meaning of these words in Gen 3:16. Since הָיִל is quite rare in the Pentateuch and חָבַל and צִיר are never found in the Pentateuch, it is difficult to know whether these were even options available to the

⁴⁴¹ See further below.

⁴⁴² Again, see further below.

author. Assuming for the sake of argument that they were, then there must be something about עֲצָבוֹן and עֲצָב that is distinctive from what would be communicated if הָיִל, תְּהַל, or צִיר had been used in their place. As noted above, the noun הָיִל can carry the sense “pain, writhing, anguish”; the verb הָיִל can have the sense “to have labor pains, writhe in pain/anguish (in labor).” Had the author of Genesis wished to characterize the negative aspect of childbearing in 3:16 in terms of physically painful anguish, הָיִל or one of its synonyms such as תְּהַל or צִיר likely would have been appropriate. By using the terms עֲצָבוֹן and עֲצָב rather than הָיִל or one of its synonyms, it seems that the author of Genesis is inviting readers to view the difficulties of childbirth and pregnancy in a different light. Rather than picturing the writhing anguish of a woman in labor, the nouns עֲצָבוֹן and עֲצָב, used in combination with הָרֹוֹן and יָלַד, depict pregnancy and childbirth as toilsome endeavors. While the referent may be pain involved in childbearing, what is being communicated about the referent is quite different from what would be communicated by הָיִל. Further, the language in Gen 3:16 does not seem to limit the experience of painful toil to the moment of childbirth, as a term such as הָיִל might. Rather, the use of עֲצָבוֹן and עֲצָב in this context probably indicates that painful toil will affect the whole process of childbearing, not only childbirth but also conception or pregnancy. Perhaps the emphasis is less on the experience of physical anguish and more on the fact that pregnancy and childbirth will be characterized by difficult, strenuous toil—work that is exhausting or burdensome in some way, whether physically or emotionally.

On the other hand, since the sense of עֲצָבוֹן likely focuses more on “toil” than “pain,” it may not even be correct to compare עֲצָבוֹן/עֲצָב with these other terms for pain. It is not clear that the noun עֲצָבוֹן actually belongs in the semantic domain of “pain, pangs,”

and thus, whether the choice was in fact between עָצַב/עֲצָבוֹן and these other words for pain. There are likely other terms with which עֲצָבוֹן is more closely synonymous. In Gen 5:29, for example, the noun עֲצָבוֹן occurs alongside מַעֲשֵׂה, suggesting that עֲצָבוֹן here may belong to the semantic domain of “work.” Perhaps it would be better to consider, then, why the author chose the term עֲצָבוֹן instead of a word such as מַעֲשֵׂה or עֲבָדָה. As noted above, עֲצָבוֹן seems to be distinct from מַעֲשֵׂה or עֲבָדָה because of its denoting some kind of negative work. Since עֲצָבוֹן and עָצַב are used, rather than one of these usual terms for “work,” it seems that the author is depicting the task of childbearing not simply as “work” but as work accompanied by some kind of difficulty or hardship that results in the work being more akin to “toil” or “painful toil”—again with the caveat that the “pain” could be physical or emotional (for which see immediately below).

Conclusion

To summarize, in Gen 3:16, the terms עֲצָבוֹן and עָצַב have the sense “toil” or “painful toil” and are used here to refer specifically to toil or hardship associated with childbearing. When compared with the three views examined above, this interpretation better accounts for the semantics of these terms and the context of Gen 3:16.

But what exactly is meant by “toil associated with childbearing”? Is this simply a different way of describing the physical pain of childbirth, or is something else in view here? In other words, what is the referent? While it seems most natural to view the “painful toil” in the second line as connected to the physical pain of childbirth, due to the use of יָלַד, the fact that the first line uses the term הָרֶוֶן may indicate that more is in view here than simply the pain experienced during the actual event of childbirth. As many critics of the traditional view have pointed out, the term הָרֶוֶן means not “childbirth” but

“pregnancy” or “conception”; perhaps, then, the first line should be understood as toil specifically affecting women during pregnancy/conception and the second line toil specifically related to childbirth. As noted above, however, these two lines in Gen 3:16 are likely co-referential, meaning that they are describing a similar referent from different angles: in this case, conception/pregnancy and birth, the two ends of the reproductive process. In other words, these lines are concerned with the woman’s experience in the childbearing process. While the second line perhaps focuses specifically on the actual moment of childbirth and the first line on the earlier stages of childbearing, they both refer to difficulty introduced into this reproductive process.

It thus seems plausible that the referent of these lines could encompass a whole range of difficulties associated with childbearing, including the physical pain of childbirth, anxiety experienced during pregnancy and childbirth, physical exhaustion and sickness experienced during pregnancy, physically and psychologically traumatic deliveries, barrenness, miscarriage, severe or fatal congenital anomalies, maternal and infant mortality, or emotional grief caused by infertility.⁴⁴³ In the end, the proposal offered here does not significantly depart from the traditional approach or the emotional view in terms of their conclusions about the referent; the main difference is the recognition that the referent in Gen 3:16 may not be limited to only physical pain or only emotional pain. עֲצָבָה and עֲצָבוֹן, having the sense “painful toil,” could refer to both of these experiences, as well as other aspects of difficulty associated with childbearing. Rather than giving specifics, the language of Gen 3:16—“I will greatly increase your (painful)

⁴⁴³ This list is only meant to give an idea of the various possible referents and is not meant to be extensive.

toil, namely, with respect to your conception/pregnancy; with (painful) toil you shall bring forth children”—allows the reader to fill in the blanks.

It is thus probably best to translate עֲצָבוֹן and עֲצָב with “toil” or “painful toil” rather than simply “pain,” as readers would likely understand “pain” in this context as referring only to the physical pain of childbirth. While the referent of Gen 3:16 may include the physical pain of childbirth, the fact that the author of Genesis chose the words עֲצָבוֹן and עֲצָב to portray this referent, rather than a term specifically meaning “pain” or “labor pangs,” suggests that perhaps there is more in view. At the very least, the author seems to be inviting readers to view the pains of childbirth from a different point of view. עֲצָבוֹן and עֲצָב do not present the difficulties of childbirth purely in terms of intense physical anguish, as the translation “pain” might suggest. Rather, these terms depict childbirth and pregnancy, or the childbearing process more broadly, as a process now characterized by difficult toil—arduous, wearisome, or painful work.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

This study has explored the semantic field of pain in biblical Hebrew and demonstrated how a better understanding of these terms and an awareness of the distinctions between them can shape our interpretation of biblical texts that use them.

Semantic Domain

The in-depth study of the terms from the semantic field of “pain, pangs” in Chapters 2 and 3 sharpened our understanding of the meanings of these words and began to illuminate the similarities and distinctions between them. Chapter 3 explored these relations of similarity and difference a bit more closely. Two conclusions can be noted in light of the discussion in these chapters.

First, the study of these terms has proven helpful in defining the borders of the semantic field. While VanGemenen’s semantic field of “pain, pangs” provides a good starting point, it was argued that there are at least two terms that could be added to the semantic domain (חלקה, ציר) and questioned whether the terms עצבון and חבל properly belong in this domain. Apart from these changes, however, VanGemenen seems to provide an adequate arrangement of the terms. In any case, his organization of the terms is probably to be preferred over that of Scharbert, who includes multiple terms that are less closely related semantically to “pain,” such as כעס and אבל, but omits other terms that one would expect to be included in the categories he presents, such as מרץ or צרה.

Second, the study of this semantic domain has demonstrated how a comparison of semantically related terms can sharpen our understanding of the meaning of each term

individually. The comparison of these terms revealed the shared features of, for example, *הָיִל* and *עָצַב*, as well as their distinctions from one another and from the more general terms *מְכָאוֹב* and *כָּאַב*. This recognition of the points of similarity and difference between these semantically related words in turn helped us to identify the specific semantic contribution of each term.

The lexical semantic study in Chapters 2–3 not only provided a better understanding of the semantic field but also demonstrated how the proper use of lexicography can shape biblical interpretation. This brings us to the second main contribution of this thesis.

Relevance for Biblical Interpretation

Chapter 4 of this study applied the lexical work laid out in Chapters 2 and 3 to a specific passage (Gen 3:16) that utilizes two terms from the semantic field and has generated much debate. A number of weaknesses were identified in each of the major interpretive approaches to this passage, particularly with respect to their lexical arguments, and an attempt was made to correct some of these lexicographical errors in light of the analysis in Chapters 2 and 3. Based on this lexical analysis, it was argued that most likely the terms *עָצַב* and *עֲצָבוֹן* in Gen 3:16 mean something like “toil” or “painful toil” rather than “pain” or “sorrow.” In the context of Gen 3:16, where they are used alongside *הָרֵוֶן* and *יָלַד*, they likely refer to toil associated with pregnancy and childbirth, or the childbearing process generally. While the referent may encompass physical pain and/or emotional suffering, it is best to preserve the sense “painful *toil*” in translation, so as to not limit the audience’s understanding of the woman’s punishment here to only physical or only emotional pain. In engaging with this debated passage, the discussion in

this chapter demonstrated the fruitfulness of careful lexical study of these terms and of semantic field analysis for biblical interpretation.

Recommendations for Further Study

This thesis opens the door to at least two avenues for future research. First, while this study focused only on terms that can have the sense “pain” or “pangs,” there are a number of other Hebrew terms for various painful experiences that could be examined. It would be valuable to consider how the words in the semantic field of “pain, pangs” relate to and differ from more abstract terms, such as *צָרָה* or *עָנִי*, and more concrete terms, such as *מָכָה*, *פָּצַע*, or *שָׁכַר*. Further research could explore these and other terms in adjacent semantic domains, such as “injury,” “distress,” or “grief.” It would also be worthwhile to more closely examine the terms found in Scharbert’s lexical analysis and compare his arrangement of the terms with VanGemeeren’s semantic field.

Second, the discussion of Gen 3:16 demonstrated how a study of these terms for pain that uses sound lexicographical methods can aid us in interpreting key passages in which these terms are used and thus deepen our understanding of biblical texts that speak about pain. While this thesis focused exclusively on Gen 3:16, there are many other passages using these terms whose interpretation is debated, such as, for example, Gen 6:6, Isa 53:3–4, or 1 Chron 4:9–10. Further study could be done to apply the lexical analysis above to these and other difficult passages.

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