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## JOB'S MURMURINGS

THE word מלה (*millah*, "word") is common in Daniel and Job. Otherwise it occurs only four times in O. T., none of which shows the plural termination in its simple form, i.e. without suffix. In the Hebrew parts of Daniel it is not surprising to find the plural written מליך (*millin*); but it is surprising to find this in Job, instead of the normal Hebrew מלים (*millim*). Is it merely due to the vagaries of scribes that we find sometimes one, sometimes the other?

מלים occurs in Job vi. 26; viii. 10; xv. 3; xvi. 4; xix. 1; xxiii. 5; xxix. 9; xxxii. 15, 18; xxxvi. 2. מליך is found in iv. 2; xii. 11; xv. 13; xviii. 2; xxvi. 4; xxxii. 11, 14; xxxiii. 8, 32; xxxiv. 3; xxxv. 4, 16; xxxviii. 2. Note variations in chapter xxxii, two of each form within eight verses.

The remaining occurrences of the word, as a singular or with suffixes, may be disregarded; nor is there need to consider the normal מלים unless indeed it suggests that מלה in Hebrew was, in O. T. times, normally vocalised as Masculine. But 2 Sam. xxiii. 2 is against this; and a masculine plural form in a feminine word has no lack of parallels.

מליך (when vocalised *mēlin*) is a perfectly normal form of the participle hiphil of לך (*lûn*) in the sense "murmuring". Perhaps Jer. iv. 14 throws light on the development of this meaning from the literal "causing to tarry at night". "How long wilt thou cause to tarry within thee vain imaginings?" The Jews were using delaying tactics, lodging complaints, murmuring against God's failure to manifest His salvation. Job, like the Jews, was for ever demanding a sign from heaven.

Let us then consider the places where מליך occurs. These may be rendered as follows:

iv. 2: "Should one attempt a word unto thee, thou wilt be impatient: and who can put restraint on a murmurer?"

xii. 11: "Does not the ear of the murmurer test it? The palate of the eater taste for himself?" Test it, i.e. the fact that everything is in the hand of God. This reading postulates a virtual doubling of ך. In M.T. the verse seems irrelevant to the context. This is taken up by Elihu:

xxxiv. 2 f.: "Hear, ye wise, my speech (מלי) and, ye knowing, give ear to me. For the ear will test the murmurer : and the palate will taste for the eater (or eating)."

xv. 13 : "For thou turnest back unto God thy breath (spirit) : and bringest forth from thy mouth, murmuring." Perhaps Eliphaz suggests that Job, in asking to die, is returning his spirit to God who gave it, without thanks.

xviii. 2 : The text of this verse is very curious. Bildad addresses Job in the plural, using an unknown word and an expression which appears ungrammatical. Perhaps it should be : "How long wilt thou regard *us* as setting snares *for thee* ? To our speeches thou shouldst give consideration and afterwards we should speak." As the text is manifestly disordered, no certain conclusion can be drawn in regard to מלין, but מלינו (*millēnu*) seems probable.

xxvi. 4 : "Whom hast thou declared a murmurer ? And whose breath came forth from thee ?" (or "With whom hast thou explained our speeches : breath of whom", etc.).

xxxii. 11 : Elihu says : "Lo, I waited for your words : I gave ear to your considerations ; till you should search out a murmurer" (or, omitting the "and" which follows, "our speeches", i.e. what we should say).

xxxii. 14 : "And he has not set in order against me, murmuring : and with your words I will not answer him" (or "And my God hath not ordered *our* speeches: with your words", etc. ; i.e., what we have said so far). Elihu belongs to the side which has been trying to correct Job ; so he politely says "our speeches" (*millēnu*), though so far he has been silent. It follows "God will thrust him down, not man".

xxxiii. 8 : "Surely thou hast said in my ears : and the voice of a murmurer I hear. Pure am I, without transgression", etc.

xxxiii. 32 : "If there is a murmurer, answer me : speak, for I delight to justify thee."

xxxv. 4 : "I will answer thee, murmurer : and thy friends with thee." Lack of rhythm suggests defect in the text. Vulgate "*thy* speeches". Perhaps it was "I will answer thy speeches : *Thee* and thy friends with thee".

xxxv. 16 : "Job opens his mouth in vanity : Without knowledge murmuring he enlarges." The exact meaning of the verb is uncertain ; perhaps it suggests flowing on strongly. LXX evidently read a verb, differing very slightly in form,

which means to make heavy. It is used of hardening the heart and (in Isa. vi) of dulling the hearing. Possibly it might mean "he would glorify himself".

So far we have seen that, wherever מליץ occurs, it might be read in such a way as not to be an abnormal form of the plural of מלה; though in some cases it has to be taken as meaning "a word of complaint", rather than a person who complains. Elihu is playing with the word. Nothing, however, has appeared which seriously affects the interpretation. But in the remaining instance it is more important:

xxxviii. 2: "Who is this that darkeneth counsel: in one murmuring without knowledge?" The traditional reading "by words without knowledge" makes the question refer to Job. "Darkening counsel" is a fine phrase: but what exactly does it mean? Whose plan is Job making dark, or possibly "withholding"? In xlii. 3 it is varied to "*hiding* counsel".

The question "Who is this?" can hardly fail to remind us of "Who is this that cometh from Edom?", where the answer is obviously Jehovah. "Who is this darkening (or withholding) a plan: in one who murmurs without knowledge?" Surely that is what Job needs to be asked. He has been floundering in the dark because he is so absorbed in the thought of himself and his undeserved sufferings. What he needs is to forget himself, to look away to the Creator and consider His greatness. First must come consideration of God's Infinite greatness; man's own littleness is the natural corollary. But it is not learned by introspection; only by first contemplating God. "Woe is me, for I am undone . . . for mine eyes have seen the Lord of Hosts." One who murmurs will be groping in darkness. This is God's will; man's foolish heart is darkened by its own foolish choice, whether that choice be heedless selfish sensuality or scrupulous self-centred introspection. It is only through this judicial darkening that man can be brought to his right mind and taught to look to the Giver of salvation.

"Who is this that darkens counsel: In one who murmurs without knowledge?" The answer is given in Isa. lxiii, "I that speak in righteousness: Mighty to save". Does not the voice from the whirlwind utter a far nobler message when interpreted in this way? One may compare also Isa. xlv. 15; xxix. 10; Ezek. xiv. 9; Prov. xxx. 4; Ps. xxiv. 8, 10.

"Who is blind as my servant? . . . Thou seest many

things but thou regardest not." Job had really known all the time. The truth had been working beneath his consciousness. In xii. 16 he had expressed it : " With him is strength and wisdom : the deceived and the deceiver are his. He leadeth counsellors away stripped : and maketh the judges fools. . . . They grope in the dark without light : and he maketh them stagger like a drunken man."

The question of xlii. 3 is rather complicated by an apparent lack of rhythm in M.T., where LXX points to a fuller text, more like xxxviii. 2. But taking it as it stands in M.T., it may be read thus : "*Thou knowest, for thou art all comprehending : and no device is fenced up from thee. Who is this that hideth counsel ? Without knowledge ! therefore I declared and I discerned not : things too wonderful for me and I knew not . . . I will ask thee, and do thou make me know.*"

Is it not worth while trying to interpret the writer of Job according to the normal Hebrew usage, and concluding that, when he writes N and not M, he is not darkening counsel by words without knowledge ?

W. A. WORDSWORTH.

*Honiton,  
Devon.*