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The Text and Interpretation of Ecclesiastes 5 19

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THIS passage: **כִּי לֹא הִרְבֵּה חֵפֵר אֶת־יָמֵי חַיָּו כִּי הֵאֱלֵהִים** presents great difficulties, which have long been recognized by interpreters. The Hiph. part. **מַעֲנֶה** may be from the root (I) **עָנָה** "to answer," or from the root (II) **עָנָה** "to be engrossed, anxious, wearied with," identical with the Ar. **عَنَّ** and the Syr. **حَنَّ**. (III) Some have understood the verb in the sense of the Syr. **حَنَّ**, Ar. **غنى** "to sing," and (IV) still others with the Ar. **غنى** "to be rich." Recent commentators have, however, varied between (I) and (II), and the other suggestions do not need serious consideration.

In favor of (I) **עָנָה**, "to answer," the names of Döderlein, Rosenmüller, Gesenius, Ewald, Delitzsch, Nowack, Wright, and McNeile may be quoted. In favor of (II) **עָנָה** "to engross," Knobel, De Jong, Siegfried, Wildeboer, and Haupt (*Ecl.*, p. 23 and *JBL*, xix. p. 71).

In either case a difficulty is felt in that as the text stands the verb has no object. Various emendations of the text have accordingly been suggested, the one most popular being the emendation of **בְּשִׂמְחָתָא** to **בְּשִׂמְחָה**, so that **לְבָבִי** will no longer be a genitive and may become the object of the verb.

The real solution of the problem is, I think, found in an appeal to the versions. So far as I know, all the elements of the solution have never been put together by a single commentator, though Siegfried closely approaches it.

Ⓞ reads: *ὅτι οὐκ ἄλλα μνησθήσεται τὰς ἡμέρας τῆς ζωῆς αὐτοῦ· ὅτι ὁ θεὸς περισπᾷ αὐτὸν ἐν εὐφροσύνῃ καρδίας αὐτοῦ*, i. e. the LXX took **מַעֲנֶה** to be from (II) **עָנָה**, and had before them the reading **מַעֲנֶנִי**. This latter point McNeile has perceived (*Ecclesiastes*, p. 144), but has overlooked the former.

S reads:

قَدْنَا بِكَ فِيهِ نَحْنُ نَعْنَدُكُمْ بِتَمِيمِ قَدْنَا
 بِكُمْ نَحْنُ نَحْنُ كَمْ عَمْرُؤًا بِخَصِّه

in which the root **חנן** as in Heb. might mean "answer" or "engross, occupy," and is accordingly ambiguous, but which clearly supports the reading **מעננו**.

The **D** reads: "Non enim satis recordabitur dierum vitae suae, eo quod Deus occupet deliciis cor ejus." This supports those who connect **מענה** with (II) **ענה**, but does not favor the reading **מעננו**. It supports instead the reading **בשמחה לכו**.

U does not translate, but gives a paraphrase, in which it is evident that they connected **מענה** with **ענה** "to humble, afflict."

The Arabic reads the last half of the verse:

لَئِنَّ اللَّهَ يَجْتَذِبُهُ فِي سُرُورٍ قَلْبِهِ

i.e. "For God attracts him by the pleasure of his heart," supporting both the interpretation of **מענה** as from (II) **ענה** and the reading **מעננו**.

Professor Haupt (*JBL*, xix. p. 71) claims that we should emend the passage according to **D**. It seems to me clear, however, that **G** the oldest version supplies a simpler and clearer reading, which is supported by the Syr. and Ar., and that we should follow its rendering, "For not much will he notice (**זכר**) the days of his life, for God engrosses him with the joy of his heart." This fits the preceding context admirably, and gives a much more appropriate meaning than "answer." The chief difficulty in the passage was created by the falling out of a **ל** at the end of **מעננו**.