“It seems to me that [Job] is translated book”: Understanding Ibn Ezra on Job 2:11

In his commentary on Job 11:2, Ibn Ezra suggests that the Book of Job was translated into Hebrew from another language. Although this comment is well-known to his readers, and to scholars of his commentary, it has not yet been studied systematically. This study is intended to fill that lacuna. In it, I analyze Ibn Ezra’s words in detail and explicate the considerations that led him to formulate his extraordinary proposal. As I shall demonstrate, his position is based a combination of philological considerations, and philosophical-theological assumptions regarding language and the language of the Bible.

Eliphaz the Temanite – from the family of Teman, the son of Eliphaz, the son of Esau. And close, it was close to the days of Moses, so he was not named after Temen but after his descendants. Our Sages said that Moses wrote the Book of Job, but it seems to me that it is a translated book, because it is difficult to interpret, as all translated books are.

Rabbi Saadia Gaon said that the language of Isaiah was clear and pleasant, and Rabbi Adonim said that this is an error because all the words of Scripture are the words of the Lord; but it is Adonim who is mistaken because the contents of the words are like the spirit and imagination that God innovates in the soul of the prophet [it is well-known that the verb “innovate” in the language of Ibn Ezra, means the invention of something new and not the reappearance of something old] and he expand on the content, in accordance with the power he received from God [the power of his vitality that he received at birth], and his nature and style.

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