

INTERPRETER

— ∞ —
A JOURNAL OF MORMON SCRIPTURE

Volume 27 · 2017 · Pages 213-220

Janus Parallelism in the Book of Job: A Review of Scott B. Noegel's Work

Jeff Lindsay

Offprint Series

© 2017 The Interpreter Foundation. A 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, 444 Castro Street, Suite 900, Mountain View, California, 94041, USA.

ISSN 2372-1227 (print)

ISSN 2372-126X (online)

The goal of The Interpreter Foundation is to increase understanding of scripture through careful scholarly investigation and analysis of the insights provided by a wide range of ancillary disciplines, including language, history, archaeology, literature, culture, ethnohistory, art, geography, law, politics, philosophy, etc. Interpreter will also publish articles advocating the authenticity and historicity of LDS scripture and the Restoration, along with scholarly responses to critics of the LDS faith. We hope to illuminate, by study and faith, the eternal spiritual message of the scriptures—that Jesus is the Christ.

Although the Board fully supports the goals and teachings of the Church, The Interpreter Foundation is an independent entity and is neither owned, controlled by nor affiliated with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, or with Brigham Young University. All research and opinions provided are the sole responsibility of their respective authors, and should not be interpreted as the opinions of the Board, nor as official statements of LDS doctrine, belief or practice.

This journal is a weekly publication. Visit us at MormonInterpreter.com

You may subscribe to this journal at MormonInterpreter.com/annual-print-subscription

JANUS PARALLELISM IN THE BOOK OF JOB: A REVIEW OF SCOTT B. NOEGEL'S WORK

Jeff Lindsay

Abstract: Janus parallelism is a recently discovered tool evident in ancient Hebrew poetry. Like the two-faced Roman god Janus, Janus parallelism employs a Hebrew word with two meanings that faces two ways. One meaning of the word relates to the preceding text while the other meaning of the word relates to the following text. Examples of such wordplays have been found in many parts of the Old Testament, though the Book of Job appears to be especially rich in these sophisticated puns.¹ A valuable tool for exploring the richness of Janus parallelism is Scott B. Noegel's detailed work, Janus Parallelism in the Book of Job (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 2009), where over 50 examples are considered. His book can greatly strengthen our appreciation for the intense and clever wordplays in Job, a book laden with puns and semantic artistry. In many cases, important new layers of meaning are revealed by understanding the long-overlooked wordplays in Job's many Janus parallelisms.

An outstanding work of biblical scholarship is found in Scott B. Noegel's research work, *Janus Parallelism in the Book of Job*,² based on his PhD dissertation at the University of Sheffield and related to a variety of publications.³

1. Nahum M. Waldman, "Some Aspects of Biblical Punning," *Shofar*, 14/2 (Winter 1996): 38–52, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42942471>.

2. Scott B. Noegel, *Janus Parallelism in the Book of Job* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 2009).

3. Examples include Scott B. Noegel, "Janus Parallelism in Job and Its Literary Significance," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 115/2 (Summer 1996): 313–20, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3266858>; Scott B. Noegel, "Wordplay and Translation Technique in the Septuagint of Job," *Aula Orientalis* 14 (1995), 33–44, <http://faculty.washington.edu/snoegel/PDFs/articles/Noegel%2013%20-%20Aula%20Orientalis%201995.pdf>; and Scott B. Noegel, "A Janus Parallelism in the Baal and 'Anat Story," *Journal of*

After all the centuries of biblical studies, it is fascinating to see how much continues to be found in the pages of the Bible. In the heavily investigated areas of poetry and especially parallelism in the Hebrew Bible, only recently have scholars begun to uncover evidence of an intriguing form called Janus parallelism. Referring to the two-faced Roman god Janus, this form of parallelism uses a single word or phrase with two meanings. One meaning completes or relates to the immediately preceding text, while the second meaning relates to the following text. It is a clever wordplay in which one word works in two ways, looking forward and backward.

Cyrus Gordon discovered and named this technique in a 1978 publication where he examined a verse in Song of Solomon 2:12:

The **blossoms** appear in the land
the time of the *zâmîr* [**pruning season** / **music**] has arrived
and the **song** of the turtle-dove is heard in our land.⁴

Gordon noted that *zâmîr* means either the “pruning season” or “music” and can thus relate appropriately to the preceding and following phrases, using both its meanings. What Gordon called Janus parallelism has been given different labels by others, including Shalom M. Paul’s delightful “polysensuous polyvalency.”⁵ Gordon himself later called the technique “asymmetric Janus parallelism,”⁶ but the simple original term seems to have stuck.

The wordplays in Janus parallelism are often classified as a form of polysemy, wherein a single lexical unit has two or more meanings. Paul Raabe, in his examination of many forms of ambiguity in the Psalms, notes that while technically one should distinguish between polysemy and

Northwest Semitic Languages 21/1 (1995): 91–94, <http://faculty.washington.edu/snoegel/PDFs/articles/Noegel%2005%20-%20JNSL%201995.pdf>. A full list of Noegel’s monographs and books is available at “Scott B. Noegel - Publications - University of Washington,” University of Washington, Seattle, accessed April 20, 2017, <http://faculty.washington.edu/snoegel/pubs.html>.

4. Cyrus Gordon, “New Directions,” *The Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists*, 15/2 (1978): 59–66, emphasis added, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24518753>.

5. Shalom M. Paul, “Polysensuous Polyvalency in Poetic Parallelism,” *Sha’arei Talmon: Studies in the Bible, Qumran, and the Ancient Near East Presented to Shemaryahu Talmon*, eds. Michael Fishbane, Emanuel Tov, and Weston W. Fields (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1992), 147, as cited by Jason M. H. Gaines, “Poetic Features in Priestly Narrative Texts,” vol. 1 of 2, PhD dissertation, Brandeis University, Dept. of Near Eastern and Judaic Studies (Waltham, MA: 2013), 49–50.

6. Cyrus Gordon, “Asymmetric Janus Parallelism,” *Eretz Israel* 16 (1982): 80–81, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23619564>.

homonymy (when two or more etymologically unrelated lexical units are identical in sound and spelling), it is often difficult to clearly distinguish between the two, and thus he ignores the distinction as he examines lexical ambiguity, phonetic ambiguity, and grammatical ambiguity.⁷

Noegel's work likewise embraces Janus parallelisms with a variety of forms. Some occur based on alternate pronunciation of words, making the parallelism an *oral* one. Others rely on words written in the same way or nearly the same way, although the pronunciation may be different, making them a *visual* Janus parallelism. Each proposed Janus parallelism is labeled to show whether it is visual or not, oral or not, and symmetric or asymmetric. If a Janus parallelism comprises three stichs with the pivot word (the word with double meaning) in the second stich, it is classified as symmetric. If it is composed of two stichs, it is considered asymmetric. Noegel's lexicon departs from the terminology of Gordon, whose "asymmetric Janus parallelism" was composed of three stichs with a central pivot, defined as symmetric by Noegel.

Janus parallelism has now been extensively studied in Hebrew, a language well adapted for complex wordplays, and also has been reported in Ugaritic, Akkadian, Arabic, and Sumerian. A similar feature occurs in Japanese court poetry,⁸ and I suppose many examples can be scoured from Chinese poetry, where puns abound, and a single written character can have not only multiple meanings but, through homonyms or relationships to different characters with similar appearance, can invoke a variety of other words to add complex layers of wordplays.

Regardless of what it and related forms are called, Gordon's insight has helped many scholars strengthen their approach in interpreting or translating ambiguous passages in scripture. Gordon explained that, in the past, commentators encountering a word like *zâmîr*, while fully aware that it could have an agricultural meaning and a musical meaning, would make the mistake of assuming it must be intended as one or the other and did not generally recognize that the ambiguity may be intentional, with both meanings correct.⁹ Since then, there has been

7. Paul R. Raabe, "Deliberate Ambiguity in the Psalter," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 110/2 (Summer 1991): 213–27, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3267083>.

8. David Toshio Tsumura, "Janus Parallelism in Nah 1:8," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 102/1 (March 1983): 109–11, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3260750>. Tsumura states that the Japanese poetic device, *kake-kotoba* in the *tanka* is a Janus-like phenomenon. He cites R. Brower and E. Miner, *Japanese Court Poetry* (Stanford: Stanford University, 1961).

9. Gordon, "Asymmetric Janus Parallelism," 80, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23619564>.

healthy progress in recognizing and learning from many other instances of intentional ambiguity with a Janus function. Other possible cases of Janus parallelism, sometimes tentative, include:

- Genesis 6:3 (“going astray”/“in that, inasmuch as”),¹⁰ Genesis 15:1 (“shield”/“giver, donor”),¹¹ Genesis 49:6 (“enter”/“desire” and “be united”/“rejoice”),¹² and Genesis 49:26 (“parents”/“mountains”)¹³
- Exodus 33:13 (“way”/“power”)¹⁴
- Ruth 1:21 (“to answer”/“to afflict”)¹⁵
- Psalm 22:17 (“encircles”/“dismembers”),¹⁶ Psalm 30:13 (one word can mean “be silent”/“mourn”/“perish,” with connections before and after its occurrence),¹⁷ Psalm 55:3 (“I groan”/“I am in a panic”),¹⁸ and Psalm 75:2 (“your name”/“your heavens”)¹⁹
- Jeremiah 25:10 (“tillage” or “tilled land”/“lamp” — but Noegel disputes this, arguing that the meaning of “land” is unsupported)²⁰²¹

10. Duane Christensen, “Janus Parallelism in Genesis 6:3,” *Hebrew Studies* 27/1 (1986): 20–24, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27908970>.

11. Gary Rendsburg, “Notes on Genesis XV,” *Vetus Testamentum* 42/2 (Apr. 1992): 266–72, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1519505>.

12. Gary Rendsburg, “Double Polysemy in Genesis 49:6 and Job 3:6,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 44/1 (January 1982): 48–51, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43716181>.

13. Gary Rendsburg in “Janus Parallelism in Gen 49:26,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 99 (1980): 291–92, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3265816>.

14. Walter Herzberg, personal communication with Cyrus Gordon, as cited by Gordon, “Asymmetric Janus Parallelism,” 80.

15. Walter Herzberg, “Polysemy in the Hebrew Bible” (New York University doctoral dissertation, 1979), 63–65, 116, as cited by Gordon, “Asymmetric Janus Parallelism,” 80.

16. James R. Linville, “Psalm 22:17b: A New Guess,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 124/4 (Winter 2005): 733–44, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3004106>.

17. Raabe, “Deliberate Ambiguity in the Psalter,” 215–16.

18. John S. Kselman and Michael L. Barré, “Psalm 55: Problems and Proposals,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 60/3 (July 1998): 440–62, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43723328>.

19. John S. Kselman, “Janus Parallelism in Psalm 75:2,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 121/33 (Autumn, 2002): 531–32, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3268159>.

20. Noegel, *Janus Parallelism in the Book of Job*, 183.

21. Daniel Grossberg, “Pivotal Polysemy in Jeremiah XXV 10–11a,” *Vetus Testamentum* 36/4 (Oct. 1986): 481–85, <http://www.jstor.org/stable1518330>.

- Habakkuk 3:4 (“rays”/“horns”)²² and 3:15 (“foaming”/“clay” [for a bowl])²³
- Amos 1:13 (“not let him return”/“blow, fan” [a fire], a wordplay also in Amos 1:6, 9, 11, 2:1, 4, 6)²⁴
- Nahom 1:8 (“its place”/“the rebels”)²⁵

But the richest source of such wordplays appears to be in the Book of Job, based on the thorough and groundbreaking work of Scott Noegel, whose book is based on his PhD dissertation and preceded by a publication in the *Journal of Biblical Literature*.²⁶

Noegel's Contribution

Noegel's work not only outlines how each of his uncovered Janus parallelisms works but also how it relates to other portions and themes in Job. After expounding the meaning and beauty of the pun, he shows how other translators and commentators have treated it in the past. Occasionally it appears the translators of the Targum or Vulgate recognized the double meaning and sought to build something similar into the text, but usually it appears that translators and others did not recognize that a double meaning might have been intended.

As an example, consider the treatment of Job 7:6–7, Noegel offers this translation:

6. My days are more trifling than a weaver's shuttle. They go without תְּקֵנָה.

7. Remember, my life is but a wind, my eyes will see no more good.²⁷

22. David Toshio Tsumura, “Janus parallelism in Hab. III 4,” *Vetus Testamentum* 54/1 (Jan. 2004): 124–28, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1519036>.

23. David Toshio Tsumura, “Twofold Image of Wine in Psalm 46:4–5,” *The Jewish Quarterly Review, New Series* 71/3 (Jan. 1981): 167–75, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1454390>. While Tsumura focuses on wordplays in Psalm 46:4–5, he considers a potential Janus parallelism in Habakkuk in footnote 13.

24. Anthony R. Ceresko, “Janus Parallelism in Amos's “Oracles against the Nations” (Amos 1:3–2:16),” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 113/3 (Autumn 1994): 485–90, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3266783>.

25. Tsumura, “Janus Parallelism in Nah 1:8.”

26. Scott B. Noegel, “Janus Parallelism in Job and Its Literary Significance,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 115/2 (Summer 1996): 313–20, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3266858>.

27. Noegel, *Janus Parallelism in the Book of Job*, 50–51.

Noegel explains that the word תִּקְוָה (*tiqvah*, Strong's 8615²⁸) means both "thread" and "hope." "Thread" parallels "a weaver's shuttle" in line 6, while "hope" parallels Job's failing hope in line 7. Noegel points to related usage of key words here in other biblical passages to strengthen the case that the relationships here are intentional.

He then examines the Septuagint and the Vulgate, both of which reflect only the meaning of "hope" for the pivotal word, but the Vulgate adds "(more) than the web is cut by the weaver" suggesting an attempt to convey the allusion to thread. The Targum attempts to capture the pun with some extra words: "they wear out and are cut off without hope." Noegel notes that nearly all commentators recognize the pun, but its specific role as a Janus parallel apparently was not recognized.

Noegel then returns to the use of "hope" and other relevant words in Job to show how the reader is prepared earlier for the wordplay in 7:6. Noegel also explores Bildad's response to Job in 8:14–15, which builds on Job's pun in 7:6, demonstrating that both meanings were intended, while trying to get the upper hand with his own pun:

The hope of the godless will perish; his confidence is a mere gossamer thread; his trust, but a spider's web.²⁹

Here Bildad has used both meanings of תִּקְוָה, and has turned the "weaver's shuttle" of 7:6 into a spider. The root for the word "weaver's shuttle" in 7:6 occurs in Isaiah 59:5 in connection with a spider, further highlighting "the skill with which both Job and Bildad weave their remarks."³⁰

In addition to identifying several types of Janus parallelism, Noegel also distinguishes it from related poetical techniques such as antanaclasis, in which a word with the same root is repeated twice but conveys differing meanings.³¹ A single word or expression is used in Janus parallelism, and different roots may be involved but not always.

Across the 222 pages of his book, Noegel unravels several dozen sometimes intricate puns and brings out substantial new meaning and beauty in the process. It is a careful work with extensive footnotes and fascinating detail.

In addition to the core of his work with the Book of Job, in Appendix 1, he also discusses a handful of additional newly discovered Janus parallelisms he has found in other parts of the Old Testament. For

28. Strong's H8615, *Blue Letter Bible*, <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong's=H8615&t=KJV>.

29. Noegel, *Janus Parallelism in the Book of Job*, 52.

30. *Ibid.*, 52.

31. *Ibid.*, 187.

example, in Isaiah 14:11–13, Noegel finds a Janus parallelism wherein one word can mean both Bright One (Lucifer) and Boastful One. As Bright One, it is parallel with the “stars of Elohim” in verse 13, while “Boastful One” is parallel with “your pride” in the previous verse.³²

In Appendix 2, Noegel examines new Janus parallelisms he has found in extra-biblical sources, including texts in Akkadian, Sumerian, Hittite, Ugaritic, Arabian, Egyptian hieroglyphics, and medieval Hebrew. This section is substantial and especially detailed in the Akkadian section. Finally, in Appendix 3, Noegel discusses a variety of Janus parallelisms in the Old Testament that others have proposed but which don’t meet the criteria to be valid Janus parallelisms. His objections are often based on challenging the evidence for a proposed second meaning of a Hebrew word.

Noegel’s work should greatly enhance our appreciation of Job as a literary marvel. The onslaught of cunning puns in that text astounds me, in particular the sophisticated use of Janus parallelisms. The Book of Job is like the transcript of a heated contest of punsters battling for literary mastery, with God being the ultimate victor. Noegel’s work is a thorough, intelligent, thought-provoking work and a significant contribution in biblical studies, in my opinion.

In light of Noegel’s work, it may be worthwhile to also compare some of the patterns he identifies in Job to possibly related passages in the Book of Mormon, where there may be value in considering the speculative possibility that Janus parallelism may have been used by some Nephite writers. A tentative exercise along these lines will be pursued in a future article.

Jeffrey Dean Lindsay and his wife, Kendra, are residents of Shanghai, China. Jeff has been providing online materials defending the LDS faith for over twenty years, primarily at JeffLindsay.com. His *Mormanity* blog (<http://mormanity.blogspot.com>) has been in operation since 2004. He also wrote weekly for Orson Scott Card’s *Nauvoo Times* (NauvooTimes.com) from 2012 through 2016. Jeff has a PhD in chemical engineering from BYU and is a registered US patent agent. He serves as Head of Intellectual Property for Asia Pulp and Paper, one of the world’s largest paper companies. Formerly, he was associate professor at the Institute of Paper Science (now the Renewable Bioproducts Institute) at Georgia Tech, then went into R&D at Kimberly-Clark Corporation, eventually becoming corporate patent strategist and senior research fellow. He then spent several years at Innovationedge in Neenah, Wisconsin.

32. Ibid., 155.

helping many companies with innovation and IP strategy. Jeff has been in China for five years, where he works with various APP companies and mills in advancing their intellectual property and innovation. Since 2015, Jeff has been recognized as a leading IP strategist by Intellectual Asset Magazine in their global IAM300 listing based on peer input. He is also lead author of Conquering Innovation Fatigue (John Wiley & Sons, 2009). He is active in the chemical engineering community and was recently named a Fellow of the American Institute of Chemical Engineers. Jeff served a mission in the German-speaking Switzerland Zurich Mission and currently serves as counselor in the district presidency of the Shanghai International District. He and his wife Kendra are the parents of four boys and have nine grandchildren.

