
ON THE MEANING OF JOB 26:9

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ABSTRACT

This study suggests that the difficulties in understanding Job 26:9 in context stem from a transcriber's erroneous transposition of the two words כסה and פרשו. It is argued that the original reading was מֵאֲחֻז פְּנֵי פְרִי־עֹז כֶּסֶה עָלָיו עֲנָנוּ, "He holds the face of a mighty ox, His cloud covers him". This can be paraphrased: "God puts a constraint on the face of the mighty bull (Behemot) and covers him with His cloud so that he would not be affected by the drying sun". The verse does not admit a celestial or cosmographic interpretation, but a mythological understanding. It depicts typical divine behaviour, which exhibits control and concern. Mentioning Behemot in v. 9 complements the reference to the sea monsters (נחש בריה and רהב) in the following verses with a land monster.

INTRODUCTION

Attribution of the speeches to the various figures in the concluding cycles of the Jobian debates is an unsettled issue. The variety of proposals is baffling and hardly any agreement exists. Clines (1960:628) claims that "the evidence of general disarray in the attribution of speeches from 24:18 to chap. 28 suggests rather that the text has been subjected to some damage in the course of transmission." This study focuses on 26:9 in the context of the unit consisting of vv. 7-13.

Verses 7-13, in Job's answer to Bildad (third cycle) are of a cosmographic nature, akin to Ps 104:2-32. In this section, v. 9, מֵאֲחֻז פְּנֵי־כֶסֶה פְרָשׁוּ עָלָיו עֲנָנוּ, stands out. This short verse contains four problematic words (פְרָשׁוּ, כֶסֶה, פְּנֵי, מֵאֲחֻז). The first word occurs only in our verse; it is not obvious what the second refers to; the third seems to be misspelled; and the fourth is a *hapax legomenon*.

No wonder that commentators are ambivalent about the meaning of v. 9. For

instance, Hahn (1850:210) explained: “Gott erhalt die Fundamente seines Thrones, das weite, flache, der Erde zugekehrte Himmelsgewölbe, trotzdem, dass es nur aus leichten, dünnen Wolken besteht.” This understanding would not naturally occur to the educated reader. Whybray (1998:166) felt that “Verse 9 may simply refer to God’s control of the clouds so that they can hide even the brightness of the full moon from view; alternatively the reference may be not to the moon but to God’s using the clouds to conceal his throne.” Neither of Whybray’s explanations, which reflect standard exegesis on v. 9, is satisfactory. One may well ask “what is the significance of the clouds covering the ‘full moon’ rather than the ‘moon’?” Why doesn’t Job use the sun which is brighter than the moon? Why doesn’t he use heaven which is of greater visible extent than the sun and moon? (Kissane 1939:198). The second explanation also raises some disturbing questions. If the heavens are conceived as the throne of God, would it be the face of the throne that is covered by the clouds?¹ How does this statement about God’s throne cohere with the cosmographic milieu? If the extensive cosmography in Psalm 104 does not mention God’s throne, why would Job be prompted to do so?

The purpose of this paper is to suggest a novel reading and mythological interpretation of v. 9 which is in line with the cosmographic nature of vv. 7-13. Using relatively minor text-critical means the reading *מִאֲחֶזַז פְּנֵי פֶרֶעַ-עוֹז כִּסֵּה עָלָיו עָנָנּוּ* can be obtained. It can be paraphrased as follows: “God puts a constraint on the face of the mighty ox (Behemot) and covers him with His cloud so that he would not be affected by the drying sun”. This observation depicts typical divine behaviour, which exhibits control and nurture. Mentioning Behemot complements the reference to the sea monsters (*נחש בריה* and *רהב*) with a land monster.

ANALYSIS

Ancient versions

Verses 5-11 do not occur in the Septuagint and have been reconstructed from

¹ Dhorme (1967:373) says: “But if the sky is the throne, it is not its face which is veiled by the cloud but its base or back.” Cf. Kissane (1939:198).

Theodotion. Accordingly, Septuagint had: “He keeps back the face of his throne stretching out his cloud upon it (Ὁ κρατῶν πρόσωπον θρόνου ἐκπετάζων ἐπ’ αὐτὸν νέφος αὐτοῦ).” It takes מָצַחַהּ = “he keeps back” (Ὁ κρατῶν); פָּנָיו = “the face of” (πρόσωπον); כִּסֵּהּ = “his throne” (θρόνου); and, פָּרְשָׁהּ = “stretching out” (ἐκπετάζων). This interpretation suggests that God does not want the face of his throne to be seen so he covers it with a layer of clouds. What happens on cloudless days? Since God’s throne is still not seen on cloudless days, the significance of the cloud cover would appear to be of no great value. So what does v. 9 tell us?

Targum is somewhat more expansive: “He hides in a mist from his throne so that the angels do not become excited, thus he spread upon it his weighty clouds” (באמתתא דמן כורסיה מן בגלל דלא יחמוניה מלאכיא פרס היך פרגודא עלוי עננא דיקריה מאחד). It renders מָצַחַהּ = “locked up, hidden” (מאחד); כִּסֵּהּ = “his throne” (כורסיה); פָּנָיו = “that from” (דמן); and, פָּרְשָׁהּ = “spread” (פרס). Targum shifts the image to God’s entourage and celestial milieu, since it was apparently inconceivable to it that man could see God.

Peshitta has “He holds fast the covering of the firmament, and spreads his cloud upon it.” It translates מָצַחַהּ = “he holds fast”; פָּנָיו = “the firmament”; כִּסֵּהּ = “the covering” (תכסיתא); and, פָּרְשָׁהּ = “spread” (פרס). The Peshitta brings back v. 9 to the cosmographic context. Its perspective can only be properly understood on the basis of contemporary cosmological beliefs, which apparently viewed the stars and planets as firmly set in a dome-like surface above the earth (Seely 1991:227-240). God had to hold this dome so that it would not collapse on earth.

Vulgate renders “He withholds the face of his throne, and spreads his cloud over it” (*qui tenet vultum solii sui et expandit super illud nebulam suam*). It takes מָצַחַהּ = “he withholds” (*qui tenet*); פָּנָיו = “the face” (*vultum*); כִּסֵּהּ = “his throne” (*solii sui*); and, פָּרְשָׁהּ = “spread” (*expandit*). Vulgate as Septuagint does not indicate from who the sight of the throne’s front is being withheld by the cloud cover. As was noted, the hiding of the throne cannot be from humanity, and is of no consequence to humanity if it is withheld from the angels. So what does v. 9 speak about?

Classical Jewish exegesis

Rashi (1040-1105) suggests that God sets in the clouds the front of his seat and covers (?) it with clouds. This celestial interpretation would make v. 9 redundant and would raise the issue of contextual coherence. Rashbam (c. 1085-1174), relying on 1 Kgs 6:10 renders מְאַחֵזוּ “made partitions”; i.e., God made partitions of honour before his seat. He also takes פִּרְשָׁיו = “spread” (פָּרַס), and assumes that clouds were spread as cover from above (Japhet 2000:401-402). It is not clear why a cover from above the seat would be needed. Rashbam also presents an anthropomorphic image of God in heaven, which is speculative and contextually incoherent.

Ibn Ezra (1089-c. 1164) takes פְּנֵי־כִסֵּה = “in heaven” (בְּשָׁמַיִם) and understands v. 9a as “in heaven he set up his seat.”² He also takes פִּרְשָׁיו = “spread” (פָּרַשׁ). It is difficult to anchor Ibn Ezra’s celestial interpretation in the text, and it is not obvious what could be the import of the information that it conveys. Ramban (1194-1270) gives a cosmographic interpretation of v. 9. He explains that God covers (מְאַחֵזוּ) the surface (פְּנֵי) of the sky (כִּסֵּה) by spreading (פִּרְשָׁיו) clouds over it. That God spreads clouds over the sky would appear rather tame following v. 8, and by itself it is inconsequential. An intriguing perspective was offered by Ralbag (1288-1344). He renders מְאַחֵזוּ = “condenses” and פְּנֵי־כִסֵּה = “heaven” (שָׁמַיִם), explaining: by condensing the air on the sky God creates the clouds upon it. This cosmographic, and rather modern perception, rests on the notion that “holding” causes “condensation.” There is no support in the Tanach for taking מְאַחֵזוּ = “condenses.”

Qara (11th-12th century) mentions Rashbam’s celestial interpretation but does not adopt it. He suggests that v. 9 presents an image of clouds covering (מְאַחֵזוּ) the surface (פְּנֵי) of God’s seat (כִּסֵּה) and are spread (פִּרְשָׁיו) before (עֲלָיו) his pavilion. Qara argues that the meaning “before, at a distance” for עֲלָיו is attested in 1 Kgs 22:19, Is 6:2, and Gn 18:8 (Ahrend 1988:75).³ However, the parallelism between פְּנֵי and עֲלָיו would

² Clines (2006:622) says: “Many, however, following Ezra and Houbigant emend to כָּסָה (= כָּסָה) ‘full moon.’” However, Ibn Ezra does not suggest this emendation in Job 26:9 and does not render in Pr 7:20 and Ps 81:4 כָּסָה or כָּסָה “full moon,” but says “in my opinion the word כִּסָּה is like a ‘fixed time’ or a ‘known date’ (לפי דעתי שמלת כִּסָּה כמו זמן קבוע או מועד (ידוע).” Cf. Zer-Kavod (1983: 41, note 42).

³ Cf. Mishnah Nedarim 4:4.

speak against such a view. A somewhat similar perspective is offered by Berechiah ben Natronai (12th-13th century). He says: “*he has established his throne in the heavens*. He closes in the thick cloud before them – the heavens, that are his throne. ... And although he closes in and fences off the face of his throne, He spreads his cloud over him” (Hirsch 1905:175-176).⁴ So what?

Modern exegesis

Most of the interpretations of modern commentators also fall into two categories: cosmographic and celestial. The cosmographic interpretation essentially focuses on highlighting God’s wise creation and control of the clouds, which can obscure even the brightness of the full moon. On the other hand, the celestial interpretation views v. 9 as focused on the mystery of God’s abode, or its grandeur. It seems that God’s throne was believed to be above the solid firmament and its “face” was hidden from humans on earth in part by the firmament and in part by clouds. Those who view v. 9 as describing another function of the clouds, “*sie sollen den Glanz der Heiligkeit Gottes dem ungeweihten Blicke verhüllen,*” misdirect the focus of the verses (8 and 9) from God to one of His agents (Umbreit 1824:253).⁵

Habel points to the significance of v. 9 to Job’s complaint that he cannot find his adversary. He says:

The relevance of this pivotal verse in relation to Job’s earlier speeches is immediately evident when we recall Job’s desire to find God’s dwelling place (23:3) in the north (23:9) and his obsession with presenting his suit before God’s face (23:4; cf. 13:15, 24) even though that ‘face’ terrified him (23:15; cf. 13:20-21). Not only is God’s abode suspended far above the void, his face is veiled by an awesome ‘cloud’ which functions as his mask and agent (Habel 1985:372).

⁴ Berechiah notes that the root of פָּרִשׁוּ is obtained by removing the last letter, and so is the case with חִלְמִישׁ (27:9), כָּרַכַּב (Ex 27:5), מַחֲסַפֵּס (Ex 16:14), etc. This is doubtful.

⁵ Umbreit (1824:253) translates v. 9: “Er verschließt den Anblick seines Thrones, breitet um ihn sein Gewölk.”

As will be shown, this perspective is not self-evident, nor generally accepted, and perhaps missed an important Jobian sentiment.⁶ In the following sections, the two main interpretative approaches to v. 9 are illustrated and discussed.

Cosmographic interpretation

Typical of interpretations in this category is that of Dhorme: “He covers the face of the full moon, Unfurling over it his cloud.” He assumes that מָאָהַר has the same sense as the Akkadian cognate *uḫḫuzu* “to cover” an object with gold or silver.⁷ However, an overlay of gold and silver adhered to the surface because they were soft metals and could *hold on* to the crevices when hammered in. Indeed, in Akkadian *uḫḫuzu* is not “to cover” but mount an object in precious metals” (Gelb et al. 1964:179b).⁸ Moreover, why only here would the author use a borrowed Akkadian sense when he does not do so in nine other uses of the root אָהַר ?

God’s covering of the full-moon was assumed as referring to a lunar eclipse or to an obscuring of the moon with clouds. Dillmann considered these notions unacceptable. He says: “d. h. den Erdschatten wäre an Mondsfinsternisse zu denken, aber in der Beschreibung V. 7ff. ware eine solche Rarität fremdartig. Blos Verdunklung des Mondes durch Wolken will *Studer* verstehen; aber warum dann מָאָהַר ? und מָאָהַר !” (Dillmann 1891:226).

Dhorme (1967:373) believes that מָאָהַר is “an erroneous vocalization of מָאָהַר ‘full moon’ of Ps 81:4.” Since the reading מָאָהַר “full moon” instead of מָאָהַר , obviates the need for definiteness it was adopted by many.⁹ Tur-Sinai (1967:382) notes that מָאָהַר is

⁶ The solution proposed in this study suggests that Job might have implicitly expressed his personal disappointment and bitterness that God does not treat him as He treats Behemot.

⁷ The meaning “covers, obscures, hides” for מָאָהַר was adopted by Schlottmann, Hengstenberg, Hirzel, Hitzig, Noyes, Dhorme, Rabinovitz and Obrunin, Tur-Sinai, Pope, Good, Gordis, Hacham, Habel, Clines, etc.

⁸ An effort has been made to define a root אָהַר with the meaning “cover” but it did not catch on. Cf. Perles (1922:83) and Perles (1927:218).

⁹ This reading was also adopted by Houbigant, Reiske, Berger, Hitzig, Studer, Wright, Budde, Beer, Moffatt, Ehrlich, Hölscher, Larcher, Fohrer, Fedrizzi, Gerleman, Ravasi, de Wilde, Sicre Diaz, Pope, Good, Newsom, Strauss, BHS, etc. Hitzig observes: “Auch hat der Mond, der Vollmond wirklich ein Gesicht (פנים), ja ein Vollmonsgesicht.” Cf. Hitzig (1874:191).

not “full moon” but the day of the full moon, i.e., the fifteenth of the month.¹⁰ Replacing “full moon” with “the fifteenth of the month” would obviously make Dhorme’s translation senseless. Driver and Gray rightly observe that “some important fact relating to the structure, or permanent order, of heaven or earth would be expected, rather than the mere closing in of the face of the moon, whether by clouds or by an eclipse” (Driver & Gray 1921b:178). Unfortunately Dhorme (1967:373) says nothing about the significance of the phenomenon that he thinks v. 9 describes. As wondrous as this phenomenon might be it is certainly surpassed by a similar phenomenon enacted on the sun. Why is the author using the full moon rather than the sun?

Dhorme (1967:373) explains that “The form פְּרָשׁוּ is a combination of פָּרַשׁ and פָּרַז, the scribe not having made up his mind which of the two to adopt.” However, the characters ז and שׁ are orthographically different from each other both in the paleoscript and the square-script. The *ketib-qere* apparatus does not attest to a ז/ש confusion. Moreover, the verb פָּרַז does not occur elsewhere in the Tanach.¹¹ It would be preposterous to assume that the author invented a word being uncertain which of the two words expresses more adequately his idea. The ancient versions (Targum, Peshitta, Theodotion, Vulgate) support the meaning “expand, spread” for פָּרַשׁוּ. However, Dhorme’s (1967:373) assertion that “in truth it is פָּרַשׁ ‘extending’, ‘unfurling’ which was the original text” goes well beyond the textual evidence.¹² A more realistic position has been adopted by Pope (1986:184) who says: “the quadrilateral verb *paršēz* is hapax and abnormal. Either *prz* or *prś* would give the sense required by the context, but *paršēz* is unexplained.” Indeed, Good (1990:119)

¹⁰ For instance, Peshitta translates וּבַחֲמֵשָׁה עֶשְׂרִי יוֹם לַחֹדֶשׁ in 1 Kg 12:32 by בִּירְחָא בַּהּ בִּירְחָא. Tur-Sinai (1967:382) mentions also the paper by Berger (1894:69-88). Line 12 of the text presented on p. 73 in Berger’s paper has [ד] שֵׁם וְ[בכס] אֵם, which Tur-Sinai reads בַּחֲדָשִׁים וּבַחֲמֵשָׁה “on the days of the new moon and the full moon.”

¹¹ The verb פָּרַז occurs in the Talmud in the sense “to breakthrough, open, exaggerate.”

¹² Driver and Gray (1921b:189) note that פְּרָשׁוּ is “a quadrilateral form, derived from a *pil’el* פָּרַשׁ, with a ‘euphonic’ change of the first שׁ to ז, and of the second to ז, or by dissimilation from פָּרַשׁ (though פָּרַשׁ is *to separate*, not *to spread out*).” They rightly categorize this explanation as “highly artificial”. Still, Hacham’s (1981:199, note 15a) rather late commentary adopts it.

leaves פרשז untranslated.

Rabinovitz and Obrunin (1916:63) suggested a variant of the cosmographic interpretation: “He covers the face of the sky, spreading his cloud upon it.” They take מֶאֱהָז = “He covers”; כָּסָה = כָּסָה = “sky”; פְּנֵי כָסָה = פְּנֵי שָׁמַיִם “face of the sky”; and, פרשז = “spread.”¹³ Apart of the difficulties with מֶאֱהָז = “He covers”, which have been already discussed, it is notable that פְּנֵי שָׁמַיִם never occurs in the Tanach. The only concept recognized in the Tanach is פְּנֵי רִקִיעַ הַשָּׁמַיִם (Gn 1:20). Why did not the author use פְּנֵי רִקִיעַ מֶאֱהָז or מֶאֱהָז פְּנֵי רִקִיעַ הַשָּׁמַיִם? Finally, the suggested interpretation is anticlimactic with respect to the wonder described in the preceding verse.¹⁴

Celestial interpretation

Typical of interpretations in this category is that of Driver and Gray: “Who closes in the face of his throne, Spreading his cloud upon it.” They note that “9a might also be translated ‘Who closes in the face of the full moon,’ viz. when the moon is eclipsed; but this is less likely, though even the translation above is not free from difficulty” (Driver & Gray 1921a:221). The difficulties are associated with the four words that have been mentioned in the Introduction.

Driver & Gray (1921b:179) say that “here, it seems, it [מֶאֱהָז] must have (as in Neh. 7³ of gates) the Aramaic sense of *holding* (with a bar), *i.e. of shutting, closing in* (so Aramaic אָהַז = κλείειν, Mt. 6⁶ and often).¹⁵ However, there are 66 biblical uses of the root אָהַז (9 of them in the *Book of Job*), all of them having essentially the sense “to take hold of, seize.” How could the author expect the reader to use its Aramaic sense only in v. 9b? What could have been the thematic need that compelled such use? Unfortunately, commentators do not address these questions.

Some 70 ancient manuscripts read כָּסָה instead of כָּסָה.¹⁶ The homophonic הָ/הָ

¹³ Rabinovitz & Obrunin (1916:63) believe that the original should have been פרשש but under the influence of מֶאֱהָז was written פרשז. However, פרשש is not attested in the Tanach or Late Hebrew.

¹⁴ Noyes (1838:163) also considers פְּנֵי-כָסָה being “the clear sky”, which is sometime covered with clouds.

¹⁵ Cf. Jastrow (1903:38b). This meaning has been adopted by Ewald, Driver and Gray, etc.

¹⁶ This reading was adopted by Houbigant, Reiske, Berg, Arnheim, Schlottmann, Dillmann,

confusion is well attested in the Tanach.¹⁷ However, even if כסא is assumed to be the correct reading, it would still be too indefinite for making a solid connection with God's throne. Hitzig (1874:191) says: "Ein Antlitz dgg. des Stuhles oder Thrones leuchtet nicht ein; und כִּסֵּא ohne Suffix last uns Ungewissen, was für ein Stuhl das sein möge." This compelled some to suggest the emendation כִּסֵּאָה or כִּסֵּאִו. Dillmann (1891:226) notes that such emendation is not necessary: "Thron schlechtweg (ohne Art.), kann nur der Gottesthron sein, und ist kaum nöthig, כסא aus urspr. כִּסֵּאָה sein Thron verderbt zu denken." Even if Dillmann is right the referent of מֵאֲחֻזּוֹ remains indefinite.

The literal phrase "face of his throne" poses a logical conundrum, because it introduces a distinction between the whole (כסא) and its part (פני). How could it possibly be that the face of the throne is enclosed but not the throne? Why does not the author simply say מֵאֲחֻזּוֹ כסא? Why does he specify the "face of his throne"? What is the significance of פני? Why has it been singled out? Hitzig (1874:191) says: "Es sei der Thron Gottes; dass er aber das Antlitzdesselben verschiessse oder 'überziehe', was soll das heissen? Wird an Tagen, da keine Sitzung ist, ein Teppich darübergehängt? Endlich hat der Thron Gottes seine Stelle erst nach V. 10."

Driver and Gray (1921b:180) assume that the *hapax legomenon* פִּרְשׁוֹ is the consequence of a scribal error. That is possible though not very likely. The presumed error would involve an addition of a letter, and acceptance of a word that is anomalous in form and meaning. Even less likely is the view that פִּרְשׁוֹ is the conflation of פִּרְשׁוֹ

Ewald, Hahn, Hengstenberg, Hirzel, Noyes, Barton, Gordis, Hacham, Habel, Clines, etc. Cf. 1 Kg 10:19.

¹⁷ The א/ה confusion can be observed in comparing 2 Kg 25:29 with Jr 52:33. For instance, in Lm 4:1א ישנאו for ישנה; Gn 42:43 אברך for הברך; איך in Gn 26:9 but היך in 1 Ch 13:12 and Dn 10:17; Lv 24:7 לאזכרה for להזכרה; Ruth 1:20 מרא for מרה; 1 Kg 22:25, 2 Kg 7:12 החבה but החבא in 2 Ch 18:24; Job 8:21 ימלה for ימלא; Is 44:8 תרהו for תראו; 2 Ch 20:35 אתחבר for התחבר; Ez 14:3 הגאלתי for אנאלתי; Jr 25:3 השכים for אשכים; Ps 76:6 השתוללו for אשתוללו; Is 63:3 הגאלתי for אנאלתי; Jr 52:15 ההמון for האמון; Hos 12:9 הון for און; 2 Sm 20:24 and 1 Kg 12:18 but הדרם in 2 Ch 10:18; Ez 30:24 but נהק in Job 6:5; צנא Nm 32:24 but צנה Ps 8:8; דכה (Dt 23:2) but דכא in some MSS (*Tanach* [Jerusalem: Koren, 1983], 11 end); Dn 11:44 according to the Massora, in the Land of Israel the reading was חמה but in Babylon it was חמא; etc. The *ketib-qere* apparatus attests to the following confusions: Jr 50:29 לא (*ketib*) but לה (*qere*); and, Ez 14:4 בה (*ketib*) but בא (*qere*).

and פָּרַז.

A variant of the celestial interpretation has been suggested by Kissane (1939:195 and 198), who renders v. 9: “Who covered the face of His pavilion, Spreading His cloud about him.” He explains: “A very slight change gives the word for ‘tent’ (טֹכָה) or ‘pavilion’ which is used in a similar connection in Jer. xxv. 38; Ps. x. 9; xxvii, 5; lxxvi. 3. The same thought is expressed by Elihu in xxxvi. 30: ‘He spreads His mist about Him: and in Ps. xviii. 11: ‘He made darkness His hiding-place, His pavilion round about Him.’”¹⁸ However, “his טֹכָה” is in Hebrew טָכְתוּ (Ps 18:12, Job 36:29). The form טֹכָה confuses the verb with the noun. Moreover, טָכָה “booth” is an insubstantial and impermanent dwelling – not a pavilion.

A popular rendition of v. 9 is: “He hides the sight of His throne, and spreads his cloud upon it” (Gordis 1965:275; Barton 1911:217; Hacham 1981:199; Clines 2006:620; etc.)¹⁹ Hacham (1981:199) notes that “according to parallelism and context the meaning of מֵאֵהוּ is ‘hides’ (לְפִי הַתְּקַבּוּלֶת וְהַעֲנִיין פִּירוּשׁוֹ מִסְתִּיר).” This does not seem sufficient cause for the introduction of a secondary root “hide” for אָהוּ. Moreover, “sight” is a human faculty while פָּנִי “face” is a concrete thing – they are not synonyms. Nowhere in the Tanach is פָּנִי used in this sense. Furthermore, it is not clear what kind of additional obscurity do the clouds provide and what its significance is.²⁰ Finally, is “his cloud” the same as the cloud that humans see, or does it refer to some heavenly cloud that cannot be seen? If it is an ordinary cloud than v. 9 does not describe a wondrous act, and if it is a heavenly cloud it is of no relevance to humans.²¹ These questions turn the suggested rendition into an esoteric statement of marginal value.

¹⁸ Note that מֵאֵהוּ is a *pi’el* participle, and cannot be the perfect “covered”.

¹⁹ For instance, Arnheim (1836:163) has: “Er verschloß des Thrones Fläche, breitete darüber sein Gewölk.” One is obviously baffled by the notion expressed by the words “verschloß ... Fläche”.

²⁰ Beer (1897:170) says: “aber der Thron ist ... schon an und für sich dem menschlichen Anblick entzogen.”

²¹ Merx (1871:139) suggested: “Das Wunder ist, dass Gott den Thron, auf dem er sitzt, doch selbst trägt.” This is clever but unfitting.

Interpretative singularities

An original reading of v. 9 was offered by Tur-Sinai. While most commentators take מִאֲחֹזֵז to be a form of the root אָחַז “grasp, take hold, take possession”, Tur-Sinai suggests that the original was מִחֹז, “from seeing his face”, where מִחֹז is a form of the root חָזָה. He explains: “The translator understood מִחֹז as a form of אָחַז, in Aramaic frequently spelt without א (see *ad* יְחֹזָה VIII, 17), perhaps under the influence of לְכַסֵּא in II Chron. IX, 18, and supplied an א, as in other cases (see especially *ad* XXX, 16).” He translates v. 9: “He concealed its face (פָּנָיו) from view, and spread his cloud upon it” (Tur-Sinai 1967:282)²² Tur-Sinai’s explanation rests on the assumption that the Hebrew version of Job is a translation from Aramaic, and it does not resolve the issue of textual coherence.

In Duhm’s view understanding מִאֲחֹזֵז as *verschliessen* is rather arbitrary and unhelpful. He prefers the meaning *festhalten*, considering the *pi’el* as an intensive *qal*. However, this understanding does not agree with the following פָּנָיו. Duhm suggests revocalization of פָּנָיו to פָּנֵי “corner pillars” (Zc 14:10). He also reads כְּסֵאָה instead of כְּסֵה, which is a revocalization of MT כְּסֵה, and assumes that פְּרִשָׁיו is a conflation of two traditions פָּרוּ and פְּרִשׁ, the latter being the correct one.²³ Duhm (1897:129-130) renders v. 9: *Er stellt fest die Pfeiler seines Thrones, und breitet sein Gewölk aus (wie einen Vorhang) vor den Throne.*

However, there is substantial difference between *festhalten* and *stellt fest*. While the first reflects אָחַז through *halten*, the second reflects *stellt*, a nuance which אָחַז does not have. Moreover, with respect to Duhm’s revocalization of MT פָּנָיו, Dhorme (1967:373) observes: “To change פָּנָיו to פָּנֵי is tantamount to postulating a plural פָּנִים instead of פְּנוֹת, which is the normal plural of פָּנָה. The only instance in which פָּנִים is found is Zec 14:10, in שַׁעַר הַפְּנִים, which is a mistake for שַׁעַר הַפְּנָה ‘the gate of the corner’ (Gray).” Finally, it is difficult to see how conflation of two words into a non-

²² The notion expressed by מִחֹז פָּנָיו occurs in Ps 17:16 and the verb-form אָחַז אֶתְחַזֵּק occurs in 23:9.

²³ Hufnagel (1781:186) seems to agree with Duhm regarding the interpretation of מִאֲחֹזֵז and כְּסֵה.

existing word would reflect two versions (*Lesarten*).²⁴

The following original translation was offered by Delitzsch (1902:73 and 166): “Er umzeichnete die Fläche des Vollmonds, streute auf sie hin sein Gewölk.”²⁵ He presumably exploits the Akkadian cognate *ahaztu* “outline” for interpreting מְאַזְתּוּ and obtaining an act that parallels the one described in the following verse. However, CAD does not have the entry *ahaztu*. Under *ahazu* it has no case in which the form *ahaztu* is used. *ahazu* means: (1) to seize, to hold a person; (2) to take a wife, to marry; (3) to hold, possess, to take over, to take to (a region); (4) to learn, to understand; and, (5) to mount (an object in precious metal).²⁶ Since these meanings are very close to those encountered in the Tanach for the root אָזַח one may well-wonder whether Delitzsch’s interpretation of מְאַזְתּוּ can be admitted. Moreover, taking פָּרֵשׂוּ = *streute* he seems to understand פָּרֵשׂוּ = פָּרַז (with the sense of פָּזַר) which is an unattested verb in the Tanach. Finally, the two cola that Delitzsch obtains are thematically disconnected.

Conclusion

Analysis of the various interpretations of v. 9 clearly shows that exegetes from early times struggled to understand this verse within its context. One could readily agree with Driver and Gray (1921b:179) regarding the cosmographic interpretation that “some important fact relating to the structure, or permanent order, of heaven or earth would be expected, rather than the mere closing in of the face of the moon, whether by clouds or by an eclipse.” But one could also formulate a similar objection to the celestial interpretation; that “some important fact relating to the structure, or permanent order, of heaven or earth would be expected, rather than the mere covering of the throne or the sky with clouds.” Analysis of the exegetical literature on v. 9 leaves an impression that the suggested interpretations convey information that is either trivial or irrelevant.

²⁴ Similarly, Beer (1897:170) states that: “Möglicherweise ist die Form nur aus doppelten Überlieferung פָּרֵשׂ und פָּרַז entstanden.” How could that be if the verb פָּרַז is not attested in the Tanach?

²⁵ Delitzsch (1902:166) says: “מְאַזְתּוּ, vgl. Assy. *ahaztu* ‘Umriss’ (HWB 42).”

²⁶ CAD Vol. 1, 173b.

There is considerable agreement on the meaning of the *hapax legomenon* פֶּרְשֵׁוֹ, but the commonly shared meaning does not rest on textual foundations. The meaning fits an image *assumed* to be conveyed by the verse; i.e., it is in essence mired in logically circuitous reasoning. A valiant effort was made to find a nuance of אָהָז that would fit a desired interpretation of v. 9. However, one is left with the impression that none of these nuances has sufficient biblical support; often the supportive verse provides support only if interpreted in a singular non-compelling manner. The textual and thematic problems of v. 9 cannot be considered now as being resolved issues in biblical scholarship.

PROPOSED SOLUTION

It is obvious that v. 9 should allude to some remarkable divine act of containment on earth since the following verses deal with the containment of Yam and the beasts in the sea. The most suitable act for this purpose would be subduing some mythical monster on earth. Divine battles against monsters are a common element in ancient Near Eastern myths. According to Westenholz (2004:38), these battles were “designed to present epic conceptions of cosmic events at the macrocosmic and microcosmic levels”. Monsters were considered an intrusion of chaos into the ordered world. For order to be maintained, the monsters had to be tamed or contained.

The biblical pairing of Behemot with Leviathan, as well as evidence from other Near-Eastern cultures, indicate that Behemot is best understood as an earth-bound mythical chaos monster. Van der Toorn et al. (1999:166-168) note that “From numerous references to Behemoth in postbiblical Jewish and Christian literature it is clear that the earliest understanding of Behemoth was as some sort of unruly mythic creature akin to Leviathan, which in the end only God can subdue.”²⁷ Indeed, in Pope’s view Ugaritic texts allude to a prototype of Behemot as a companion to *ltn* (Lotan = Leviathan). Among the several monsters which ‘Anat boasts of having conquered along with Leviathan she mentions a bovine creature in the obscure phrase

²⁷ See this source for a synopsis of the various perceptions of תַּמְהוֹם in the Tanach.

'*gl il 'tk* (KTU 1.3 iii:43-44), "the furious bullock of El".²⁸ The solution being proposed in this study rests on the assumption that v. 9 refers to Behemot, which is being alluded to in the verse as being a mighty ox (פּר־עוֹז).

It is conceivable that a transcriber, coming across a text that seemed to him as פּר־שׁוּז פּנִי כֶסֶה מֵאֵהוּז, felt that the first part was awkward and might be the consequence of the erroneous transposition of the two adjacent words כֶסֶה and פּר־שׁוּז. His correction resulted in MT of v. 9 but contained a misreading of the words פּר עוֹז as פּר־שׁוּז. Such misreading would not be unusual in a densely written document. Tov (1989) notes, "In the writing of some copyists various letters fuse into a single letter, which can be confused with other letters. This tendency is clearly noticeable in the Qumran Scrolls in which ו – ע, ז – ע, י – ע fuse into a single letter similar to ש (see in particular 11QPs^a [Plate 8^{*}, Column X, lines 1 and 6])."²⁹ Thus it is possible that the transcriber confused עוֹז with שׁוּז. One might rightly argue that any respectable transcriber would surely know that the word פּר־שׁוּז does not exist in the Hebrew language and would reject this possibility or would read פּר עוֹז. It seems, however, that the transcriber was presented with the following dilemma: פּר־שׁוּז does not exist in the Hebrew language, but on the other hand the *plene* עוֹז does not occur in the book of Job and perhaps in the Tanach. Assuming that the ז is a scribal error caused subconsciously by the previously written ז in מֵאֵהוּז, and easily recognizable as such, he transcribed פּר־שׁוּז.

²⁸ Cf. Pope (1986:320-322). Cassuto (1965:68) leaves '*tk* untranslated. Pope (1986:320) notes that "since Bochart most modern critics have identified the animal in question as the hippopotamus. It has been suggested that the word Behemot itself is derived from a hypothetical Egyptian compound *p'-ih-mw*, 'the ox of the water,' but no such word has been found in Coptic or Egyptian and no known Egyptian designation of the hippopotamus bears any close resemblance to the word Behemoth." Felix (1962:24) observes that the hippopotamus has a "large clumsy head and the heavy body rests on four short stout legs, bearing four toed cloven hoofs. Though an excellent swimmer, the river-horse walks awkwardly on dry land. Most of the time it stays submerged in water, with its head kept above it ... its staple food is grass ... it rests and sleeps on the bank of the river. ... Now these animals are extinct in Egypt. In Israel they became extinct probably, in biblical times."

²⁹ Tov (1989:199) also notes that: "A phenomenon similar to ligature is mentioned in Mishnah Shabbath 12:5: וְכִתְבֵי שְׁנֵי זֵימִין נִתְכּוֹן לְכַתּוּב." Cf. Pinker (2011:151-164).

The *plene* עוֹז is indeed very rare in the Tanach, but it occurs once in Ps 84:6. This occurrence is not, however, accidental since the prefixed *plene* form בעוֹז is attested in Pr 31:17 and 24:5. Also, the *plene* verbal forms עוֹזָה and יְעוֹז occur in Ps 68:29 and Dn 11:12. The *plene* form עוֹז is possible in the Tanach and so is the reading פר עוֹז instead of פרשׁוֹ. The form פר-עוֹז is similar to מגדל-עוֹז (Jd 9:51, Ps 61:4, Pr 18:10), מטה-עוֹז (Jr 48:17, Ez 19:14), מבטה-עוֹז (Pr 14:26), etc. The word עוֹז is used three times in the book of Job (12:16, 26:2, 41:14), and a construct with עוֹז occurs in v. 2.

As we have seen the association of a “mighty ox” (פר עוֹז) with Behemot is rather natural. Pope tried to identify the bovine beast in the Ugarit text KTU 1.3 iii:43-44 with the creatures having the face of Ba‘al in the Ugarit text designated BH; i.e., creatures that live exclusively on land.³⁰ However, the biblical traditions, true to their Near Eastern context, also describe composite monsters, and it seems from the description in Job 40:15-24 that Behemot was a composite monster.³¹ Indeed, some scholars understand the whole of the Behemot-Leviatan pericope (Job 40:15-41:26) as alluding to some single being.³²

Verse 9, reading מֵאֲחֻז פְּנֵי פֶרֶעֿ-עוֹז כִּפְסָה עָלָיו עָנְנוֹ, can be translated “He holds the face of a mighty ox, His cloud covers him”. This translation can be paraphrased: “God puts a constraint on the face of the mighty ox (Behemot) and covers him with His cloud so that he would not be affected by the drying sun”. God’s constraint reminds one of the bridle that is put on an animal’s face to control it. The author might have had in mind such a bridle because he uses similar imagery in 41:5 (רִקְנוֹ). Also, 40:24 alludes to the eyes and snout of Behemot as parts of the face used for controlling the monster. In v. 9a the author simply says “He holds the face”, perhaps shutting the monster’s eyes and putting a hook through the snout. Muzzling Behemot is a wondrous divine act akin to similar acts performed against the sea beasts. Moreover, 40:21-22 describe Behemot’s need for shade and water to cool his body, which God provides

³⁰ Pope (1986:321) points to the bovine nature of these creatures.

³¹ While the notion of Behemot drew on actual animals such as superior oxen, water buffalo, and the hippopotamus, myth enlarged these awesome animals to monstrous proportions. The category mixing that is evident in the description of Behemot (40:15-24) clearly places him within the realm of the monstrous.

³² Cf. van der Toorn et al. (1999:167); Fuchs (1993:225-264); and Ruprecht (1971:209-231).

with a cover of clouds blocking rays of the sun in the summer and providing rain water in the winter. This too is a wondrous act of God, demonstrating his caring for the conquered rebel.

Understanding v. 9 as referring to a mythical mighty ox (Behemot) makes eminent sense. It also has the following advantages:

- There is no need to guess a suitable meaning for מאהזו. Its standard sense suits well.
- The word פני retains its standard meaning “face”; i.e., the face of Behemot is used for controlling it, as is the case with all tamed animals.
- The phrase פִּרְעֵוּז is an obvious intuitive depiction of Behemot. The adjective עוּז, with respect to Behemot, is aptly detailed in 40:16-18.
- Reading פִּרְעֵוּז instead of פִּרְשׁוּז obviates the need for artificial explanations of how this *hapax legomenon* was created and what is its meaning.
- The word כֶּסֶה aptly fits ענן “cloud”. It is used in conjunction with ענן in the following instances Nm 9:15, 16, 17:7, Lv 16:13, Ps 147:8, Ez 13:18, 32:7, Ex 24:15, 16, and 40:34. On the other hand פִּרְשׁוּז, the generally accepted meaning of פִּרְשׁוּז, occurs only once in the Tanach (Ps 105:39), but not in a celestial or cosmographic context. The proposed solution uses the more established biblical association.

While the spelling כסה for כסא is possible (כסה occurs twice in 1 Kg 10:19) this spelling never occurs in reference to God’s throne. Transposing כסה and פִּרְשׁוּז, and reading כֶּסֶה gives a better contextual fit. כֶּסֶה also obviates the need for the emendation כֶּסֶאוּ or כֶּסֶאה.

The relatively minor emendations that have been made, the consequent considerable advantages that have been obtained, and the resultant contextual coherence form a strong rationale for recommending the reading מֵאֵהוּז פְּנֵי פִּרְעֵוּז כֶּסֶה “He holds the face of a mighty ox, His cloud covers him”. The image conveyed in v. 9a is that of God putting a muzzle on a beast’s face to manipulate its behaviour. In v. 9b God’s typical concern for the creatures created comes to the fore. Once Behemot is under control, God protects him from quickly drying up by covering him with the shade formed by His cloud (cf. 40:23b).

CONCLUSION

Andersen (1976:217) observes that vv. 5-14 present “one of the most fascinating cosmological passages in the entire Bible. More than a dozen elements are listed: earth, water, cloud, sky, *etc.*, sometimes under the names they had in old myths, such as Yam (*sea*), *Rahab*, and especially *the fleeing serpent*. A little of the vocabulary comes from Genesis; *e.g.*, *the void* (7a) is the word translated ‘without form’ in Genesis 1:2. But none of the creation verbs of Genesis is used. It would seem that more than one old creation story has supplied the disparate imagery.” This pastiche of phrases from various mythological traditions is also apparent in the description of Behemot as a bovine beast that lives most of the time in water and needs protection from the sun.

The difficulties that exegetes encountered in their attempts at understanding v. 9 in context stem from not recognizing that the verse deals with the subjugation of Behemot. The critical word seems to be פני “face,” which is awkward for both the celestial and cosmographic interpretations, but is perfect for a context in which a mighty ox is restrained. The first two letters of פרשז strongly suggest “ox”, which Behemot is. The possibility of the ligature ש = עו completes the identification פרשז = פרעוז = Behemot. Thus, using relatively minor text-critical means, the reading קאָהוּ פְּנֵי פֶרֶשׁז עוֹז כֶּסֶה עָלָיו עֲנָנוּ “He holds the face of a mighty ox, His cloud covers him” is obtained. This can be paraphrased: “God puts a constraint on the face of the mighty ox (Behemot) and covers him with His cloud so that he would not be affected by the drying sun”.

The verse does not admit a celestial or cosmographic interpretation, but a mythological understanding. It depicts typical divine behaviour, which exhibits control and compassion. One of God’s wondrous acts at creation was to restrain a rebellious Behemot, but no less wondrous was His caring for the well-being of Behemot afterwards. In this reference, Job might have expressed his personal disappointment and bitterness.

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