

THE MEANING OF "THE NORTH"

IN JOB 26:7

by

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The word רָיָה־בַּיָּמִים in Job 26:7 has two major interpretations. The terrestrial view equates a literal Mount Ṣāpôn with the word. This mountain was originally located on the north Syrian coast of the Mediterranean Sea. It was thought to be the particular habitation of the god Baal in Ancient Near Eastern cultures. The terrestrial view relies largely on the assumed occurrence of mythological terms in the Old Testament. In particular, close parallels between Scripture and Ugaritic literature lend support. According to Psalm 48:2, Israelites may have transferred the cosmic significance of the Syrian mountain to their own Mount Zion in Jerusalem, where God dwelt. The celestial view identifies רָיָה־בַּיָּמִים with the sky above the earth. This view seeks to equate Job 26:7 with parallel creation passages which tell of God stretching out the heavens.

A number of arguments are given in support of each interpretation of רָיָה־בַּיָּמִים . Neither view clearly dominates the issue at this time. There are even alternate choices of the root of רָיָה־בַּיָּמִים which can be seen as supporting either view. One interesting possible meaning for רָיָה־בַּיָּמִים recognizes the cloud-shrouded appearance of Mount Ṣāpôn . Its clear peak often appears to be suspended between heaven and earth. This may be part of the reason for Mount Ṣāpôn 's cosmic background and also the reason for the use of רָיָה־בַּיָּמִים in Job 26:7. A case is made against the use of the verse as an evidence for a literal "empty place" in the northern sky.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Overview of the Problem

The book of Job contains many fascinating cosmological passages. For example, Job 9:9 declares that God is the creator of the stars and the constellations. Job 37 describes in detail the power and complexity of a Mediterranean thunderstorm. Job 26:5-14 is another such passage which refers to many natural objects, including the earth, the sea, the clouds, and the moon. Some of the other elements in this same Job 26 passage are not as easily understood, such as the pillars of heaven (v. 11), Rahab (v. 12), the fleeing serpent (v. 13) and the north (v. 7). Such words and phrases held deep mythological significance in the minds of the people, both before and long after Job's day. The search for the intended meaning of these historically rich terms has resulted in much scholarly literature and debate. Continuing research into Ugaritic and other contemporary cultures gives a dynamic emphasis to the interpretation of such passages in Job and in other Old Testament books.

The word גִּפְזָ as found in Job 26:7 is the object of this study. It has been historically interpreted in two different ways. First, it may refer to the northern skies suspended above the earth. This will be called the celestial view of Job 26:7. Some see in the verse a direct reference to the origin of stars and therefore to the fourth day of the creation week. Others have gone to the extreme of using the verse as a proof-text that the third heaven is located in a northerly direction from the earth.¹ If גִּפְזָ does indeed refer to the northern skies, one might also see in the verse a reference to the nearby clouds and atmosphere of earth. The Job 26 context certainly does emphasize meteorological phenomena. As a second interpretation, the word גִּפְזָ may refer to a literal northern mountain which was well known to Job's contemporaries. In contrast to the previous celestial view, this will be called the terrestrial view of Job 26:7. Certain surrounding mountains in the Ancient Near East held mythological significance as particular abodes of the gods. Ugaritic epics speak repeatedly of a particular Mount Ṣāpôn as the "cosmic mountain" retreat of their god Baal-Hadad. This terminology was later transferred by Israelites to Mount Zion in Jerusalem (Ps 48:2). If Job 26:7 is indeed

¹S. Zodiates, "That Open Space in the North," Pulpit Helps 6:9 (June 1981):2.

referring to a literal mountain, then the Lord is declared to have priority and power over all lesser gods, including Baal.

The goal of this study is to determine whether or not a single primary meaning of the word גִּבְעָה as it is used in Job 26:7 is apparent at this time. The two major alternative views will be analyzed and contrasted.

Presuppositions of This Study

Higher critics have strongly attacked the literalness of the man, Job, as well as the authenticity of the book bearing his name. However, based on the consistent details of the book and the clear testimony of other Scripture (Ezek 14:14,20; Jas 5:11), it is certain that Job was an historical person. He lived in the land of Uz (Job 1:1), a part of Edom located south of the Dead Sea (Lam 4:21). The book's basic unity is shown by the complex interrelationships of its parts. The Job narrative belongs to the Wisdom genre of literature. Therefore, its poetic sections are expected to allow for a free, figurative interpretation. The text is assumed to be an integrated whole written by a single author. This author is unknown. However, the book remains the verbally inspired Word of God and therefore without error as originally given.

It is further assumed that the word גִּבְעָה does indeed have a single primary meaning in the text which was

clearly understood at the time of the book's writing. The original meaning may or may not be evident to us today. This is not to reject the concept of double reference in Biblical prophecy whereby both a near view and a far view are present in the fulfillment. However, the sense of Biblical words is assumed to be singular.¹ It is on this basis that one may strive to arrive at a conclusion regarding the specific meaning of $\gamma\acute{\iota}\nu\epsilon\tau\alpha\iota$ in Job 26:7.

Certain words and phrases in Job, Psalms, Isaiah, and other Old Testament books, imply the use of mythological terms by the authors. By the word "myth" is meant stories from the creative imaginations and ideals of early cultures. Subjects recorded include descriptions and activities of gods and the supernatural world in general. Certain words used to tell these stories took on special meaning and hence became mythological terms. This is not to say that the Bible itself contains myth. On the contrary, such a view is firmly rejected in this study. However, the Bible may well make use of well-known symbols from mythology in its message without in any way approving of them. The parallel terms may simply appear in Scripture for purposes of illustration and communication, without adopting the mythology as truth. This usage has given rise to a "mythological hermeneutic" in which extra-Biblical texts are

¹Paul L. Tan, The Interpretation of Prophecy (Winona Lake, IN: Assurance Publishers, 1974), p. 213.

used to help determine the original sense of Biblical texts. Of special application to Job and the rest of the Old Testament has been the literature of Ras Shamra, or Ugarit. Kapelrud chronicles the history of relating Ugaritic texts to Old Testament understanding since the discovery of Ugarit in 1928.¹ Semitic scholars such as the late Mitchell Dahood have radically reinterpreted the grammar, philology and etymology of the Old Testament Hebrew texts in terms of Ugaritic. Others warn that Hebrew-Ugaritic comparative studies require extreme caution and criticism.² A good deal of care must indeed be exercised with this comparative approach. There is at this time a lack of clear criteria for establishing the existence of mythological literature in the Biblical text. Udd surveyed several alleged "mythopoeic" words in Job and concluded that the non-mythological rules of hermeneutics were entirely adequate for their interpretation.³ The analysis of Job 26:7 in this particular study will therefore not assume from the outset a mythological background. In fact,

¹Arvid S. Kapelrud, Baal in the Ras Shamra Texts (Copenhagen: G. E. C. Gad, 1952), p. 16.

²P. C. Craigie, "Ugarit and the Bible: Progress and Regress in 50 Years of Literary Study," in Ugarit in Retrospect, edited by Gordon D. Young (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns Publishing Company, 1981), p. 111.

³Stanley V. Udd, "An Evaluation of the Mythological Hermeneutic in Light of the Old Testament Usage of the Leviathan Motif" (Th.D. Dissertation, Winona Lake, IN: Grace Theological Seminary, 1980), p. 214.

the consideration of the possible existence of mythological language in Job 26:7 is the basic thrust of this study.

CHAPTER II

CONTEXTUAL AND EXEGETICAL ANALYSIS

Book of Job

Chronology

Dual chronological frameworks are needed both for the time of Job's experiences and also for the time of the book's actual writing. The position will be accepted in this study that Job lived during late patriarchal times.¹ A general date may be given as sometime after 2000 B.C., the time of Abraham. This conclusion is based on at least four particular insights. First, Job sacrificed animals to God on behalf of his family (Job 1:5, 42:8). Such an early family-clan social order is similarly shown by Noah's offerings (Gen 8:20) and Abram's altar (Gen 12:7). Second, Job's wealth is described in terms of cattle (Job 1:3), just as for Abram in Genesis 13:2. Third, Job's lifespan of at least 180 years reflects the temporary longevity of the patriarchal age. Fourth, the name Job appears in

¹John C. Pappas, "The Date of the Book of Job" (M.Div. thesis, Grace Theological Seminary, 1976), p. 41.

extra-Biblical literature as early as 2000 B.C.¹ In the Berlin Execration Texts, 𐤁𐤏𐤍 is the name of a prince of the land of Damascus around the 19th century B.C. Around 1400 B.C., the name appears again as a prince of Pella. Job lived in the land of Uz, a territory outside of Palestine. In such a location, the evident patriarchal setting could well have existed hundreds of years after the time of Abraham. Thus, it is impossible to narrowly specify a date for Job's life.

For the time of the actual writing of the book, scholars have suggested dates covering a wide span between the eleventh and the fourth centuries before Christ.² The book of Job could well be a product of the Solomonic Wisdom era. Solomon ruled Israel during 965-925 B.C. This was a time during which the similar language of Psalms 88-89 also appeared. The well-known story of Job was probably transmitted orally and in written form for hundreds of years before being recorded in its present form under the direction of the Holy Spirit.

¹M. G. Kline, "Job," in The Wycliffe Bible Commentary, edited by C. F. Pfeiffer and E. F. Harrison (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971), p. 459.

²J. J. M. Roberts, "Job and the Israelite Religious Tradition," Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 89 (1977):109.

Author

There has been much speculation regarding the authorship of the book of Job. Far-ranging suggestions have included Moses writing to the suffering Hebrews in Egypt, or Job's friend, Elihu, as biographer. Certain phrases have led some to believe that the book was translated from Arabic or Aramaic sources, possibly by King Solomon. Such distinctives as Job's rejection of star worship in Job 31:26-28 give an Israelite flavor to the book.¹ Job himself is also sometimes considered the author.² This wide range of possible authors and dates emphasizes the uncertainties involved with the book. The possibility remains that the Lord moved an anonymous Israelite writer of Solomon's day to record Job's story of patience during suffering.

Background

Job is a dramatic narrative belonging to the category of Wisdom Literature which was common during the period of Solomon. Such poetic writing in the Old Testament (Pss, Prov, Job, Eccl) presents Hebrew ideals for practical godly living, usually apart from a specified context of

¹J. J. M. Roberts, "Job and the Israelite Religious Tradition," Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 89 (1977):111.

²R. Laird Harris, "The Book of Job and Its Doctrine of God," Grace Journal 13:3 (Fall 1972):3.

Israelite history. Hebrew poetry has complex parallelism as its basic structure and is rich in figures of speech. Sequential synonymous expressions are often used to gain emphasis. The book of Job is widely recognized even by its critics as one of the most dramatic poems ever written. The intended immediate audience surely included all who enjoyed the high culture of Solomon's day.

Overview

Job treats the simple yet profound question of why righteous people suffer in this life. The narrative opens with a heavenly court scene. Satan requests and receives permission to test the character of Job. Satan then brings a series of extreme misfortunes and sufferings into Job's life (chaps 1-2). The next twenty-eight chapters (chaps 3-31) consist of three cycles of debate between Job and his "miserable comforters," Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar. The comforters repeatedly suggest that Job's own sin and pride must have brought calamity upon himself. Back and forth the argument goes, with Job's friends condemning him and with him humbly proclaiming his innocence. Job is torn between thoughts of life's unfairness and his confidence in God's sovereignty.

Chapter twenty-six is included in the third and final cycle of speeches. Eliphaz begins this cycle by accusing Job of hypocritically dwelling on God's greatness

and man's wickedness, while dismissing his own responsibility (chap 22:12-20). Job replies that he is sincerely searching for God and that prosperity is the temporary lot of the wicked in this life only (chaps 23-24). By now the futile arguments of the comforters are exhausted. Zophar does not speak at all and Bildad's final short speech pessimistically portrays man as beyond God's care (chap 25). Because of such changes in the book's cyclic structure at this point, some critics have proposed that later deletions and insertions have grossly modified the original text.¹ The lofty speech which follows in Job 26:1-14 has been attributed to both Bildad and Zophar by various scholars.² However, the narrative itself builds smoothly toward the intended climax in its present form and the text itself names Job as speaker in the first verse. In the second verse, Job strongly challenges Bildad, sarcastically complimenting him, "What a help you are to the weak!" Job then launches into a five chapter description of God's loving greatness and his own innocence. Chapter twenty-six especially testifies of God's dominion over the physical creation. Job outdoes Bildad in magnifying God with this beautiful hymn of praise.

¹Robert Gordis, "Virtual Quotations in Job, Sumer, and Qumran, in Vetus Testamentum 31 (October 1981):416.

²P. P. Zerafa, The Wisdom of God in the Book of Job (Rome: Herder, 1978), p. 112.

A fourth comforter named Elihu makes his appearance in chapters thirty-two through thirty-seven. He rightly declares that earthly affliction is often a means for purifying the righteous and serving the hidden purposes of God. Following Elihu's presentation, God Himself addresses Job out of a whirlwind (chaps 38-41). Job humbles himself and can utter none other than the key verses, 42:5-6 (NASV):

I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear;
But now my eye sees Thee;
Therefore I retract,
And I repent in dust and ashes.

Job perhaps still did not understand the reason for his suffering, but the question was no longer important. He had been strongly reminded that God remains sovereign in all things. This fact was sufficient. Job's selfless character led him to pray for his friends who had let him down earlier (Job 42:9). For this, Job was eventually rewarded twofold beyond his original status (chap 42:7-17).

Job 26:7

Job twenty-six is certainly one of the most fascinating cosmological passages in the entire Bible. The whole chapter gives a grand progressive description of God's dominion over the underworld (vv 5-6) and the earth and skies (vv 7-13). Verses five through nine are characterized by a participle style of action. Thus, God "stretches" and "hangs" (v. 7); "wraps" (v. 8); "obscures" and "spreads" (v. 9). Verse seven in the Hebrew text reads:

נֹטֶה צִפּוֹן עַל-תְּהוֹ
 תְּלֵה אֶרֶץ עַל-בְּלֵי-מָה

The uncertainties in the translation are illustrated by the varied renditions:

He stretcheth out the north over the empty place, and hangeth the earth upon nothing (KJV).

God stretches out heaven over empty space, and hangs the earth upon nothing (Living Bible).

He spreads out the northern skies over empty space; he suspends the earth over nothing (NIV).

He stretches out the north over the void, and hangs the earth upon nothing (RSV).

He stretches out the north over empty space and hangs the earth on nothing (Berkeley).

The northern skies he spreads o'er empty space, and hangs the earth on nothing (Moffatt).

He stretches out the north wind upon nothing, and he upon nothing hangs the earth (Septuagint).

God stretched out the northern sky and hung the earth in empty space (Good News Bible).

He it was who spread the north above the void, and poised the earth upon nothingness (Jerusalem Bible).

The active participle, נֹטֶה, means to stretch out, spread, or extend. The following preposition, -לְעַ, accusative of direction or location, often occurs in the Old Testament. In Exodus 9:23, Moses stretched out, נֹטֶה, his staff toward the heavens (עַל-לְשֹׁמַיִם). The combination of נֹטֶה plus -לְעַ is used as a figure of hostility toward God in Job 15:25 concerning one who has stretched out his hand against God. The similar statement to Job 26:7 that God

stretches (נָטַף) out the heavens as a curtain, canopy or cosmic tent frequently occurs in the Old Testament:

Job 9:8	Isaiah 40:22	Jeremiah 10:12
Psalm 104:2	42:5	51:15
	44:24	Zechariah 12:1
	45:12	
	48:13	
	51:13	
	51:16	

Thus, נָטַף can be considered as a typical participle used for expressing praise to the Creator. Other verbs with the same context include the following:

נָקַע	to beat, stamp, beat out, spread out The Lord stretched out the heavens Isaiah 42:5, 44:24; Psalm 136:6; Job 37:18. ¹
פָּרַשׁ	to spread, spread out He spread a cloud for a covering Psalm 105:39. ²
נָטַף	to extend, spread My right hand spread out the heavens Isaiah 48:13. ³

The general phrase, "stretching out," thus appears to be a common figure of speech with several variations.

The verse, Job 26:7, declares that צִפּוֹן is stretched out over תְּהוֹם. This word first appears in Genesis 1:2, "And the earth was without form (תְּהוֹם) and void (צִפּוֹן)." The word תְּהוֹם has been variously translated as formlessness, confusion, unreality and emptiness.⁴ It has long been debated

¹Francis Brown, S. R. Driver and C. A. Briggs, editors, A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), p. 955.

²Ibid., p. 831.

³Ibid., p. 381.

⁴Ibid., p. 1062.

whether or not this word always carries the connotation of God's judgment. If so, then Genesis 1:2, as well as Job 26:7, might well support the restitution view of cosmogony. This view proposes an original perfect creation with Satan as the ruler of the world. He subsequently rebelled and sin entered the universe. God then judged the earth and reduced it to a chaotic state assumed to be described by הָאָרֶץ נִבְחָה in Genesis 1:2. Following a time gap of unknown length, God then recreated the earth, beginning with Genesis 1:3. This view is variously called the "gap," "restitution" or "ruin-reconstruction" theory. However, this idea is not accepted by an overwhelming majority of exegetes since it fails the tests of grammatical analysis.¹ Instead, the word הָאָרֶץ is simply a description of something in an unfinished or imperfect state. Thus, הָאָרֶץ is used to describe a formless early earth (Gen 1:2), as well as empty, powerless idols (1 Sam 12:21). Job 26:7 may indeed point back to the original creation event, although none of the creation verbs of Genesis appear here. Regardless, Job 26:7 does not support the gap theory.

¹Bruce K. Waltke, "The Creation Account in Genesis 1:1-3. Part II: The Restitution Theory," in Bibliotheca Sacra 132 (April 1975):136. Also, Weston Fields, Unformed and Unfilled (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1976), pp. 114-129.

גִּבְעָה

Occurrence and Root

The feminine noun, גִּבְעָה, occurs 151 times in the Old Testament, including 46 times in Ezekiel and twice in Job. There is controversy regarding its etymology. Tur-Sinai connects גִּבְעָה with the verb הִבִּיחַ, "to float."¹ He then translates the Job 26:7 phrase, "He stretched out the floating land over the void." Hence, the formless earth is represented in this view as a "floating island." Lipiński also supports this view.² There is no solid evidence for this approach and Pope's evaluation of the suggestion as being "bizarre" is appropriate.³ It has also been suggested that גִּבְעָה should be equated with or emended to גִּבְעָה, the masculine noun, "ceiling."⁴ There is likewise no evidence for this indirect relationship. Some choose the verb root, גִּבַּע, "to hide" or "treasure up." גִּבְעָה would thus carry the idea of a dark hidden region. The ancients indeed

¹Naphtali Herz Tur-Sinai, The Book of Job: A New Commentary, translated by H. Tarczyner, revised ed. (Jerusalem: Kiryath Sepher Ltd., 1967), p. 380.

²Edward Lipiński, "El's Abode: Mythological Traditions Related to Mount Hermon and to the Mountains of Armenia," Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica 2 (1971):62.

³M. H. Pope, Job, in The Anchor Bible (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Incorporated, 1973), p. 183.

⁴Robert Gordis, The Book of Job, in vol. 2 of Marshet Series (New York: The Jewish Theology Society of America, 1978), p. 278.

regarded the north as the seat of gloom and darkness, in contrast to the light and sunny south. This root is neutral in favoring either the terrestrial or celestial view of גִּבְעָה . Application could be made to either a darkened sky or to the recesses of a mountain slope. Still others believe that גִּבְעָה derives from נִבְּרָה , "to spy" or "keep watch."¹ This possible root clearly favors a terrestrial mountain view for גִּבְעָה . It then serves as a concrete noun describing a lookout point, or mountain. The derivation of גִּבְעָה , "lookout point" from נִבְּרָה follows perfectly the pattern of formation of גִּבְעָה , "seeing," from נִבְּרָה , "to see." The storm-god Baal is indeed recorded as using Mount Şāpôn as a lookout point on Ugaritic tablets.²

Translation

The word גִּבְעָה carries the following translations and occurrences in the KJV:

north	113
north side	12
north wind	1
northward	24
northern	1

¹Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, s.v. "Orientation," by B. S. Childs, 3:608.

²Michael C. Astour, "Place Names," in vol. II of Ras Shamra Parallels, ed. L. R. Fisher, et al (Rome: Pontificum Institutum Biblicum, 1975), p. 320.

Another word for north, מִן־רָקִיעַ , occurs only in Job 37:9. This plural substantive from רָקַע means "scatterers" and refers to the winds.¹ The northern direction was also thought of as the source of wind which scattered the clouds and brought cool, clear weather to the southern regions.

The word גַּדְפָּן also occurs in the Old Testament as a proper name. It is listed as a city of Gad, situated north of Succoth (Josh 13:27; Num 33:7). The Zephanites, a clan from this city of Gad, are mentioned in Genesis 46:16 and Numbers 26:15. There also existed a shrine to the chief Canaanite deity Baal-ṣāpôn in the region of northern Egypt. It was near this shrine where the miracle of the parting of the sea occurred (Ex 14:2,9).

The Cosmic Mountain

In Canaanite mythology, the surrounding northern mountains were considered to be special dwelling and meeting places of the gods. Such heights were looked upon as a direct contact between heaven and earth, as well as the essential source of water, fertility, and divine order in the world. The term "cosmic mountain" has arisen to describe the religious significance attached to such lofty heights. The Old Testament Hebrew people also adopted some of this cosmic emphasis. Thus, Psalm 48:1-3 places Mount Zion, the location of Jerusalem and the temple, figuratively

¹BDB, p. 279.

in the north in spite of its actual location in southern Palestine. Psalm 48:2 reads:

Beautiful in elevation, the joy of the whole earth, Is
Mount Zion in the far north (צִיּוֹן), the city of the
great King.

This shows a popular recognition of the north and perhaps the literal Mount Şāpôn as a sacred place. God is also pictured as appearing out of the north (Job 37:22; Ezek 1:4). Other Old Testament passages retain the evil connotation of false gods inhabiting the north (Jer 4:6; Joel 2:20). There is good reason for this since the false god Baal, in particular, was thought to dwell in the north region.

In Ugarit, the great god, El, was considered the father of many lesser gods or elim.¹ The Hebrew name of God, also El, is a generic term having no connection with Canaanite paganism. The pagan god, El, possessed several wives, one of whose names appears as Asherah throughout the OT. Baal was a son of El and head of the Canaanite pantheon of gods, according to tablets from Ugarit. He is elsewhere described as the son of the ancient leading Amorite god, Dagon. Baal was thought, in particular, to inhabit the northern regions. He is described as the "rider of the clouds" and controller of the fertility of both man and crops. A Ugarit stele depicts him as the

¹Charles F. Pfeiffer, Ras Shamra and the Bible (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1962), p. 29.

"storm god" with a thunderbolt in his left hand and a club in his right.¹ In Semitic mythology, Baal also represented the cosmos which he established and organized against the opposition of the god of chaos, Yam, and the god of death, Mot.² This god was given the personal name Hadad by west Semites. Mythology placed Baal's center of power in a particular mountain which carried several names:

Mount Hazzi	Hittite texts
Jabal-al' Agra'	Syrian texts
Mount Şāpôn	Ugaritic texts
Mons Casius (Κάσιος)	Classical Greek sources
Bald Mountain (i.e., snow-capped)	Present name

There Baal ruled as king. There was also his dwelling place and his burial by his sister and consort, Anat, following his death. The literature from Ebla also has much to say about Baal. Consequently, the god's frequent title, Baal Şāpôn, was well known. Mount Şāpôn was also itself worshipped as a separate deified object at Ugarit.³ Kapelrud has even suggested that the altar for sacrifices in Baal's temple may have been called 𐎗𐎍𐎕 , directly connecting the cultic shrine with the mountain.⁴ The people of Ugarit also

¹Ibid., p. 30.

²Benedikt Otzen, Hans Gottlieb, and Knud Jeppesen, Myths in the Old Testament, trans. Frederick Cryer (London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1980), p. 17.

³Astour, "Place Names," p. 319.

⁴Kapelrud, Baal in the Ras Shamra Texts, p. 58.

recognized a special mountain as the abode of El. Its identification is uncertain, although Lipiński places it in the same general region as Mount Ṣāpôn.¹ He also suggests that El, in Ugaritic belief, had his residence on Mount Ṣāpôn before Baal did.

The particular mountain of Baal is located on the Syrian coast, fifty kilometers north-northeast of ancient Ugarit.² It is visible from the city. In location, it is directly pointed at by the long east-west peninsula of Cyprus and is indeed located in the far north of the Ancient Near East. A map showing the mountain has been prepared by Eissfeldt.³ Because of its location on the Mediterranean shore, the mountain served the seafaring people of Ugarit as an important landmark. To them, Baal-Ṣāpôn became the patron deity of the sea.⁴

One can appreciate the complications involved in interpreting the word $\gamma\dot{\iota}\epsilon\ddot{\gamma}$ in Job 26:7. It is variously used for a direction, city, tribe, god, and for a particular mountain. In the following sections, the particular meaning of $\gamma\dot{\iota}\epsilon\ddot{\gamma}$ in Job 26:7 will be considered.

¹Lipiński, "El's Abode," p. 58.

²William Foxwell Albright, "Baal-Zephon," in Festschrift für Alfred Bertholet zum 80. Geburtstag, ed. Baumgartner, et al (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1950), p. 2.

³Otto Eissfeldt, Baal-Zaphon, Zeus Kasios und der Durchzug der Israeliten durchs Meer (Halle (Saale): Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1932), p. 72.

⁴Albright, "Baal-Zephon," p. 11.

CHAPTER III

TERRESTRIAL VIEW OF גִּבְעָה IN JOB 26:7

Definition

The terrestrial view of גִּבְעָה in Job 26:7 maintains that the word refers to a literal mountain. This view gives a concrete meaning to גִּבְעָה as opposed to the abstract idea of sky, heavens, or direction. The idea was initially proposed in 1932 by Eissfeldt.¹ Its popularity has grown with the discovery of many references to a literal Mount Şāpôn on Ancient Near Eastern tablets from Ugarit and other area cities. The adherents also tend to interpret many other Old Testament words and phrases in terms of closely related Ancient Near Eastern parallels as well. Representatives include M. H. Pope,² M. Dahood,³ J. J. M. Roberts,⁴ and O. Eissfeldt.⁵

¹Eissfeldt, Baal Zaphon, Zeus Kasios, p. 1.

²Pope, Job, p. 183.

³Mitchell Dahood, "Ugaritic-Hebrew Pairs," in vol. I of Ras Shamra Parallels, ed. L. R. Fisher, et al (Rome: Pontificium Institutum Biblicum, 1972), p. 322.

⁴J. J. M. Roberts, "ŞĀPŌN in Job 26:7," Biblica 56 (1975):554.

⁵Eissfeldt, Baal Zaphon, Zeus Kasios, pp. 13-14.

Arguments

The following points summarize the major arguments in support of the terrestrial view of גִּבְעֹתַיִם. The list is not necessarily in order of importance, nor all-inclusive. The arguments will also be evaluated where appropriate.

The Pillars of Heaven

Job 26:11

The overall language of Job clearly shows many similarities to the Ugaritic dialect.¹ Pope has tabulated many of the parallel phrases.² The passage, Job 26:7-12, in particular, contains several words and phrases apparently drawn on the language of Canaanite mythology. Included are the "pillars of heaven" (v. 11) and "Rahab" (v. 12), as well as גִּבְעֹתַיִם. In early extrabiblical literature, the pillars of heaven sometimes refer to a pre-scientific belief in literal support columns which hold up the sky. The argument by extension is that all three references in Job 26 should be seen in such an Ancient Near Eastern context. In this case, גִּבְעֹתַיִם could well refer to the sacred and well known Mount Şāpôn. This is not to say that the writer of Job accepted literal support columns to support the sky. The description of the "pillars of heaven and earth" as found in Scripture (1 Sam 2:8; Job 26:11; Ps 75:3) by no means imply

¹Harris, "The Book of Job," p. 14.

²Pope, Job, p. 183.

literal support columns or pre-scientific errors in Scripture. Why indeed would the writer say that the earth hangs upon nothing (v. 7) and then call upon literal support columns just four verses later? The Old Testament is everywhere a sharp anti-mythical polemic against cosmologies of a solid heavenly dome supported by literal pillars in the sky.¹ The writer of Job may have been describing the very foundation of the physical heaven and earth. Perhaps the pillars of Job 26:11 refer to the internal support of the earth, or even the mountains themselves. The writer may also have used the common language of building construction to describe the Lord's power. Just as stone pillars shake in an earthquake, so the Lord's rebuke shakes the earth.

Rahab

Job 26:12

Job 26:12 refers to the Lord's shattering of Rahab. This obscure title occurs several times in Scripture, including the name of the woman of Jericho. Sometimes the word is obviously used as a term for Egypt (Ps 87:4; Is 30:7). One might even see a possible connection between רַיָּבָּ in the north (v. 7) and Rahab as Egypt in the south (v. 12). However, many other Rahab references may be

¹Gerhard F. Hasel, "The Polemic Nature of the Genesis Cosmology," The Evangelical Quarterly 46 (April-June, 1974):81.

either to a fierce mythological or literal creature. If the mythological use is the case in Job 26:12, then it could be reasoned that רָהַב also carries a mythological cosmic mountain meaning. Ugaritic literature offers a parallel to Job 26:12 where the god, Baal-Hadad, strikes down Rahab by means of wondrous weapons.¹ Could this usage of Ugaritic terminology be duplicated in both Job 26:12 and 26:7? Udd urges caution in accepting this inviting view.² He has analyzed the Old Testament reference to רָהַב , נְהַש , רָהַב , and רָהַב . His tentative conclusion is that these words refer to actual physical beasts and thus are not mythological references at all. Such creatures of the sea were so greatly feared that in mythology, they came to be worshipped.

Regarding רָהַב , the terrestrial view is favored by either view for Rahab. If Rahab, in Job 26:12, identifies a literal creature, so then could רָהַב identify the mountain bearing the same name. If Rahab is a purely mythological term, then רָהַב would naturally describe the cosmic mountain region in the north.

¹Pope, Job, p. 185.

²Udd, "An Evaluation of the Mythological Hermeneutic," p. 216.

The Mount of the Assembly

Isaiah 14:13-14

Isaiah 14:12-17 is a passage describing the fall of the king of Babylon due to rebellious pride. The inner thoughts of the ruler are stated in Isaiah 14:13-14:

But you said in your heart,
'I will ascend to heaven;
I will raise my throne above the stars of God,
And I will sit on the mount of the assembly.

In the recesses of the north (צפון),
I will ascend above the heights of the clouds;
I will make myself like the Most High.'

Here a connection between צפון, the assembly, and the clouds is made. Both Isaiah and Ugaritic records describe the lofty assembly, the עֲרֵב-מִלְעָד. This was thought of as an assembled gathering of gods, somewhat like the Greek pantheon. In Mesopotamian, Ugaritic, and Greek literature, such assemblies of seated gods are commonplace. Since a mountain named צפון plays a major role in Ugaritic epics, צפון is then taken as the same literal mountain meeting place in both Job 26:7 and in Isaiah 14:13. However, it must be admitted that many such sacred mountains were named. The Ugaritic literature even names other mountains as the main assembly places instead of צפון. Thus, this argument for a terrestrial interpretation of צפון does not necessarily identify Mount Şāpôn as the particular place in view.

¹Richard J. Clifford, The Cosmic Mountain in Canaan and the Old Testament (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), p. 5.

El and Baal

Kapelrud makes a strong case for a struggle between the deities El and Baal in Ugaritic texts.¹ El was considered the ancient supreme god of Ugarit. However, he was eventually defeated by Baal and banished to the underworld. Thus, Baal's holy mountain could be thought of as a monument standing above the defeated lower places. Job 26:7 can then be seen as a subservient transposition of mythology to the God of the Hebrews. Yahweh is declared to hold infinite power over the forces of darkness.

Progression of Thought in Job 26

The passage, Job 26:5-13, carries a progression of thought from the lowest parts of the earth to the highest parts of heaven.² Verses 5-6 begin with a description of Sheol and Abaddon, the lower place of departed spirits. Verses 7-8 have a similar duality, referring to לִבְדֵּי suspended over אֵינָן and followed by the earth hanging upon nothing. The polar opposite of the underworld is the sky (Amos 9:2; Ps 39:8). Thus, the description moves from the lower parts of the earth to the surroundings of earth. Verses 9-10 finally mention the distant moon and visible horizon. The following verses describe the heavens,

¹Kapelrud, Baal in the Ras Shamra Texts, p. 75.

²Roberts, ṢĀPŌN in Job 26:7," p. 556.

including the "fleeing serpent" which is possibly associated with the constellation Draco. $\gamma\text{'}\text{פ}\text{צ}$ best fits this sequential pattern as a particular mountain located on earth, seemingly suspended between the underworld and the heavens.

Other Passages

Eissfeldt discusses several other Old Testament passages where $\gamma\text{'}\text{פ}\text{צ}$ is used. In most of these, he makes a strong case for a literal mountain interpretation. In Psalm 89:13, he says that $\gamma\text{'}\text{פ}\text{צ}$ and $\gamma\text{'}\text{ק}\text{ז}$ must be cultic regions, just as Mounts Tabor and Hermon are so pictured in the same verse.¹ However, the verse is admittedly unclear at this time. In Ezekiel 32:30, Eissfeldt also sees a reference to "the land of Mount Ṣāpôn " rather than simply direction.²

The list of arguments just considered promotes a terrestrial mountain view of $\gamma\text{'}\text{פ}\text{צ}$ in Job 26:7. Most of the discussion involves Ugaritic mythology that is thought to be reflected in the Old Testament. In summary, it is known that Ugaritic people recognizes a particular Mount Ṣāpôn as the home of their god, Baal. This prominent mountain on the northern border became synonymous with worship. It was, therefore, a natural and well-known location for

¹Eissfeldt, Baal Zaphon, Zeus Kasios, p. 12.

²Ibid., p. 11.

the author to use in Job 26:7. In contrast to the superstitions of surrounding peoples, the verse declares that God has power and priority over such places as Mount Şapôn.

CHAPTER IV

CELESTIAL VIEW OF 77D7 IN JOB 26:7

Definition

This traditional view takes 77D7 as a reference to the northern skies. Included here are possibly the clouds, atmosphere, or even the stars. Whatever the case, the region of the north is considered to be above and beyond the earth. Adherents of this view tend to be skeptical of novel interpretations of the Old Testament on the basis of extra-biblical data. They include R. J. Clifford,¹ H. L. Ginsberg,² and J. P. Lange.³ Even Dahood, who specialized in Old Testament-Ancient Near Eastern writings, frequently voiced the danger of employing second millennium writings from Ugarit to explain first millennium poems from Palestine, such as Job.⁴ Of course, this is a very common controversy which often coincides with a flux of new data in any

¹Clifford, The Cosmic Mountain, p. 162.

²H. L. Ginsberg, "Reflexes of Sargon in Isaiah after 715 B.C.," Journal of the American Oriental Society 88 (March 1968):51.

³Otto Zöckler, Job, in Lange's Commentary on the Holy Scriptures, trans. L. J. Evans (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1872), p. 510.

⁴Mitchell Dahood, "Ebla, Ugarit and the Old Testament," Supplements to Vetus Testamentum 29 (1977):110.

field. Still, the celestial view has a substantial number of arguments in its favor. The following discussion is a summary of the major arguments which favor the celestial view for the meaning of שָׁפֹן in Job 26:7.

Arguments

Orientation

The Hebrew words for all four cardinal directions are derived from geographic designations.¹ The word for south, נֶגֶב, had the original meaning of "arid land." The desert region southwest of the Dead Sea is still called the Negev. West was named after either the Mediterranean Sea (מִזְרָח) or the place of the setting sun (מְבֹרַח שֶׁל שֶׁמֶשׁ מֵעֶרֶב). East was the "front" (פְּנֵי) or the place of the dawning sun (מְבֹרַח). The Hebrews and semitic peoples in general regarded the direction of east as the cardinal point of reference. Existing Mesopotamian tablet maps sometimes are drawn with east at the top.² Consequently, the "left hand" designated the direction of north (Gen 13:14, 14:15; Josh 15:10; Judg 21:19; Job 23:9; Jer 1:13). North was also considered as higher ground than the south. Hence, a trip from south to north was "going up" (Gen 45:25; Hos 8:9; Acts 18:3), while the opposite was "going down" (Gen 12:10; 26:2; 38:1;

¹Childs, "Orientation," p. 608.

²Roberts, "שָׁפֹן in Job 26:7," p. 554.

1 Sam 30:15,16; 25:1; 26:2). Certainly the Old Testament use of the word דָּרָוֶן for the direction east does not necessarily refer to the literal sea. Likewise, to assign גִּבְעֹן in Job 26:7 specifically to a fixed mountain in the north may be a retreat to an etymological origin which no longer applies.

This celestial argument is countered by some further thoughts on orientation. Regarding the north, it may be asked whether the abstract northern direction derived from a previous concrete Mount Ṣāpôn , or vice-versa. Eissfeldt opts for the primary meaning of גִּבְעֹן as a proper name of a mountain.¹ He notes that the directional meaning of גִּבְעֹן never occurs in Ugaritic records. Since the mountain lies generally north of both the Phoenicians and Israelites, the name גִּבְעֹן later then became a general designation for direction.

The direction of north is a primary orientation with respect to the heavens and especially with respect to God's glory. In some sense, the north is seen as the particular direction of God's abode. Thus, Psalm 75:6 implies that God comes from the north to judge man. In Leviticus 1:11, the sacrifice is to be offered northward. Ezekiel's vision of God's glory (Ezek 1:4) was also seen in the north. Perhaps God selected this particular emphasis on

¹Eissfeldt, Baal Zaphon, Zeus Kasios, pp. 16-18.

direction in the Scripture because it was an integral part of man's mindset. After all, $\gamma\dot{\iota}\epsilon\Upsilon$ had meant the "abode of God" for many generations of people. If this is the case, Job 26:7 could naturally refer to this northern, sacred portion of earth and to Mount $\mathfrak{S}\dot{\alpha}\rho\hat{o}\mathfrak{n}$ in particular.

God Stretches Out the Heavens

The statement that God "stretched out the north over the void" is very similar to God's "stretching out the heavens" as a curtain or cosmic tent. This phrase occurs frequently, as shown in the previous section on the analysis of Job 26:7.

Habel says that this common idiom is designed to identify and magnify Yahweh as the unique living God of the entire earth, who is in the process of revealing his magnificence.¹ Habel does not see the idiom as pointing to the creation of the heavens. Rather, the Lord is in some way preparing a unique domain for His heavenly theophanies. If the Lord's creative action is in view, then the sky or canopy of heaven is created above the yet formless earth in agreement with Genesis 1. Job 26:7-13 may indeed describe the work of creation. The pitching of the canopy of heaven with its multiple repetitions in Scripture is a basic description of the physical universe. Note that this argument does indeed assume a creation backdrop to Job 26.

¹Habel, "He Who Stretches Out the Heavens," Catholic Biblical Quarterly 34:4 (October 1972):420.

It may or may not be a creation passage. In addition, Psalm 89:12 describes God's creation of both the north and the south with reference to the earth, rather than to the heavens.

One must question why the Job 26:7 reference mentions only the north, if the reference is indeed to the heavens. In the parallel passages, the object is always the plural רָקִיעַ . A limitation to only one region of the sky in Job is peculiar. Also, the parallel statement of God stretching out the heavens as a tent does not really fit the description of a northern sky. The tent in view probably resembled that of the present day Bedouins. It is mainly a top covering, with removable sides. A north side usually is not even necessary. It is the south side that must be covered to give protection from the sun. To "stretch out the heavens as a tent" must then refer more to the overhead zenith stars, rather than to northern regions. In addition, atmospheric dimming greatly reduces the visibility of all northern and southern stars. These locations are generally dark in comparison with near-overhead regions of the sky. From this, the equivalence between Job 26:7 and such passages as Isaiah 40:22 appears to be doubtful.

The similarity between the passages, Job 26:7 and Isaiah 40:21-23, deserves further comment. In the Isaiah passage, the verb יָשָׁב , to sit, remain or dwell, is used twice with reference to God. In other passages (Ps 29:10,

9:8; 102:13; 1 Sam 4:4; 2 Sam 6:2), this verb describes God's throne. When applied to Isaiah 40:22, the picture is of God enthroned high above the earth, looking down upon His subjects far below as grasshoppers. The verb, *לָשַׁב*, at the end of verse 22, indicates that the stretching out of the heavens results in a cosmic position from which God rules over the earth.¹ The implication is a celestial emphasis which may be carried over to Job 26:7.

Poetic Antithesis

It is unlikely that the writer would refer to the mountains in the first part of Job 26:7, then the whole earth in the second part.² Instead, Hebrew synthetic parallelism tends to move from the general to the particular. A description of the heavenly skies followed by the earth would be consistent with this trend, as seen for example in Isaiah 51:13. One thus expects a reference to the sky in verse 7a to coincide with the description of earth in verse 7b.³ *רָמַל*, as the sky above, stands in antithesis to the earth below. As a literal mountain, *רָמַל* would not fulfill this complementing role. *רָמַל*, as a literal mountain, would be using a part for the whole earth, which is not

¹Ibid., p. 421.

²F. Delitzsch, *Job*, vol. 2, trans. Francis Bolton, in *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1970), p. 53.

³Ibid.

usually done. Ginsberg strongly concludes that because the standing of רָחֵם is in antithesis to the earth, it admits of no other interpretation than "sky."¹ This argument is countered by a lack of other antithetical verses in the same chapter.

Stretch, רָחַץ

The verb, רָחַץ , is never found in Scripture with reference to the stretching out or expansion of the earth or any part of the earth.² On the other hand, רָחַץ is often used as a stereotype for the expanse of the heavens. The common word for the heavens, מִן־שָׁמַיִם , is ten times governed by רָחַץ :

Isaiah 40:42	Jeremiah 10:12
42:5	51:15
44:24	Zechariah 12:1
45:12	Psalm 104:2
51:13	Job 9:8

These are, again, mainly the passages in which God is said to "stretch out (רָחַץ) the heavens." In addition, מִן־שָׁמַיִם is paired with the earth (אֶרֶץ) as it appears in Job 26:7 in eight of the preceding passages, Isaiah 40:22 and Job 9:8 excepted.

¹Ginsberg, "Reflexes of Sargon," p. 51.

²Lange, Job, p. 510.

The Stars

S. Terrien suggests that Job is possibly referring to the north star, Polaris, by the word $\gamma\text{׳}פּצ$.¹ Others have also taken $\gamma\text{׳}פּצ$ as that part of the firmament around which the stars seem to be pivoted.² Bittenwieser contends that $\gamma\text{׳}פּצ$ is a description of the celestial north pole formed by the seven stars of Ursa Minor. This is the "little dipper," whose handle begins with the star, Polaris. Bittenwieser further explains that all the motion of the universe was commonly thought to proceed from this point.³ The polar sky can be considered as the contrasting opposite of the underworld (Job 26:6; Amos 9:2; Ps 139:8). Furthermore, the northern constellations revolve around the static pole star every twenty-four hours in dramatic fashion before all who will take the time to watch them. The appearance really is of a northern starry sky stretched over emptiness. Thus, both the heavens (Job 26:7a) and the earth (Job 26:7b) rest upon nothing. The following verse continues with the miracle of water also suspended in the clouds.

¹The Interpreter's Bible, s.v. "Job," by Samuel Terrien, 3:1094.

²E. Dhome, A Commentary on the Book of Job, trans. by H. Knight (Camden, NJ: Thomas Nelson, Incorporated, 1967), p. 372 and E. B. Smick, "Mythology and the Book of Job," Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society 13 (1970):101.

³Moses Bittenwieser, The Book of Job (London: Hodder and Stoughton, Ltd., 1922), p. 281.

Several constellations are named in the book of Job, as if the writer's mind continually returned to thoughts of the heavens. In Job 9:9 and 38:31-32 are found the bear (Ursa Major), fleeing serpent (Draco?), Pleiades, Orion and the chambers of the south (Scorpius?). However, only the first two constellations actually appear in the northern sky. Hence, the interpretation that $\gamma\dot{\imath}\text{פ}\ddot{\text{צ}}$ must be the polar star in some special, unique sense is severely weakened.

There is another problem involving star brightness. The northern stars, Polaris included, are simply not impressively bright. Of the twenty-two brightest stars as seen from earth, only three appear in the north (Vega, Capella, and Deneb). Most of the bright stars during the year are found high in the southern sky. Even brighter than these stars are the planets, or wandering stars. Their brilliance and irregular movements singled them out from antiquity as divinely controlled. Each of them moves on the ecliptic, again placing them high in the southern sky. If a reference were to be made to the lights of heaven, these overhead stars and planets would be a more natural choice than northern stars.

Weather

The word $\gamma\dot{\imath}\text{פ}\ddot{\text{צ}}$ is often used with respect to the north wind and its ability to drive away clouds and rain (Eccl 1:6; Ezek 1:4). This actual phenomena is common in Palestine where clearing north winds are frequent. Thus,

Solomon refers to the north wind which drives away the rain (Prov 25:23). The north itself tends to be cloudy and rainy in contrast to the clear south. In Psalm 18:8-13, God is pictured as residing in the rain clouds and controlling the storms. This leads de Savignac to conclude that many of the גִּפְּזִים passages (Job 26:7; Is 14:13; Ps 48:3, 89:13; Ezek 1:4) refer to the cloudy sky or atmosphere.¹ In each of these passages, a connection of גִּפְּזִים with the cloudy northern sky is indeed possible.

Verse 13 of Job 26 describes the Lord's breath as making the skies fair. It further mentions the view of the fleeing serpent. It may possibly be the constellation Draco of the northern skies, but others believe that the fleeing serpent is a personification of the clouds, just as Rahab may picture the raging sea.² The chasing away of the clouds or the stilling of the sea thus may be described to show God's power over chaos. One thus sees another possible reference to the clearing effects of the northern skies in verse 7.

If גִּפְּזִים refers to the sky and the clouds in particular, it would seem that the word רִזַּז might have been a better choice to use. This word means "scatterer" or

¹J. de Savignac, "Note Sur Le Sens Du Terme גִּפְּזִים Dans Quelques Passages De La Bible," Vetus Testamentum 3 (1953):95.

²Edward J. Kissane, The Book of Job (Dublin: The Richview Press, 1939), p. 199.

"stretched out one." The word מִזְרַח is found only in Job 37:9, where cold scattering winds from the north (מִמְּזֻרְיִם) are described. In view of the very limited use of מִזְרַח, a strong case cannot be made for its preferred use in Job 26:7.

הַחֵל

As discussed earlier, הַחֵל can simply refer to an empty space where life is absent. The word in Job 26:7 may apply to the atmosphere or to space itself in agreement with the celestial view. However, הַחֵל is also often used as a representation for an evil condition such as might be associated with the northern mountains. The Mesopotamian epic of Gilgameš sheds further light on the mythological beliefs regarding this region. The assembly of the gods is described in a location which remains uncertain. Nevertheless, it is described as a place of subterranean passages.¹ The northern mountains were also the obvious source of rivers and springs. The gates of the underworld were said to be hidden in the slopes.² One begins to understand the common rabbinical statement in the Talmud that Gehenna lies somewhere behind the land of darkness. To the people who worshipped the true God, Mount Şāpôn and its accompanying heights were indeed situated directly over הַחֵל.

¹Lipiński, "El's Abode," p. 49.

²Ibid., p. 35.

What is one to conclude from the lengthy list of evidences for both the terrestrial and celestial view of $\gamma\text{פָּץ}$ in Job 26:7? An impressive list of arguments can be found to support either view. Even the various possible roots of the word $\gamma\text{פָּץ}$ point either strongly to one view or the other. Of course, the correct result cannot always be readily determined by lining up the available evidences. Furthermore, a single strong evidence could dominate both lists and determine the correct choice. In the final chapter, the evidence will be reviewed and weighed.

A Question: Is There an "Empty Place" in the North?

We have considered the sense in which the north is seen as the particular direction of God's abode. There is further a popular belief that evidence exists for a special location of physical emptiness in the northern skies. As Zodhiates writes:

One of the most inspiring and thrilling of recent disclosures of astronomers is that there is a great empty space in the north of the nebula of the constellation of Orion--a heavenly cavern so gigantic that the mind of man cannot comprehend it and so brilliantly beautiful that words cannot adequately describe it . . . What has been found correlates the words of Job; 'He stretcheth out the north over the empty place' (Job 26:7).¹

Whenever such "recent disclosures" of science are used to unlock the secrets of Scripture, one should immediately be suspicious. After all, history chronicles the continual

¹Zodhiates, "That Open Space in the North," p. 12.

debate over scientific ideas. All scientific pronouncements are tentative and temporary. With an infinite amount of data to consider, nothing can really be known absolutely on the basis of natural science alone. Unfortunately, false and uncertain science continues to be used in an attempt to bring drama and enticement into Scripture interpretation. The false announcement that computers had detected the "lost day of Joshua" is one such example.¹ The long day was real; the alleged scientific verification was not. Another case was the predicted 1982 line-up of planets which was to have ushered in the tribulation period.² Now, in addition, we have the empty place in the north where heaven is located! The idea must be rejected for several reasons.

First, Zodhiates describes the Orion nebula in his preceding quotation. This is a region of colorful obscuring gas and dust in the midst of the Orion constellation. It is certainly not a void or empty space, but is instead beautifully studded with stars. The word אֵינֶנּוּ could apply to this region or to hundreds of other similar nebular regions that have been observed and photographed. They are seen in all

¹John C. Whitcomb, Jr., "Joshua's Long Day," Brethren Missionary Herald 25 (July 1963):364.

²Donald B. DeYoung, "Defects in the Jupiter Effect," Proceedings of the Indiana Academy of Science 89 (1980): 350.

regions of the sky, thus removing any particular significance to Orion or any other direction.

Second, Orion is not a northern constellation. All of Palestine and Mesopotamia, just as most of the United States, lies between 30° and 40° north latitude. Meanwhile, Orion straddles the celestial equator at 0° latitude. Hence, from anywhere in the Middle East or from the United States, Orion is a southern constellation. It appears high in the southern sky for half of each year and is invisibly in the daytime sky the rest of the time.

Interestingly, recent science announcements have been made concerning a newly-discovered void in space. There is apparently a region of space consisting of 6.5×10^{63} cubic miles in which the density of galaxies is twenty-five times less than the average of all space.¹ Such a vast region is large enough to contain a billion galaxies like our own Milky Way. The void is in the direction of the summer constellation Bootes, and is said to be a billion light-years away. Such a discontinuity of matter casts basic doubts on a uniform big bang origin of the universe. However, the finding certainly does not revive the idea of an empty place in the north. The region is not completely vacant. It simply contains fewer stars and galaxies than expected on a statistical basis. Also, the stars of

¹Robert P. Kirsher, "Hole in Space," Natural History 91 (September 1982):27.

Bootes cannot be said to be in the north either. This star group is at 10° north latitude and therefore appears slightly south and nearly overhead for the 30° - 40° north band of latitude. The conclusion is evident that man's telescopes have not found physical evidence of the location of heaven. Heaven is a literal and glorious place, but is not subject to visual inspection at this time by skeptical astronomers. In spite of such popular Bible-science ideas which may develop from time to time, theological concepts which derive from science alone, let alone from poor science, must remain suspect.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Review of the Problem and Arguments

The meaning of the word $\gamma\text{'}\text{p}\text{z}$ in Job 26:7 has been controversial since the discoveries of Ugarit in 1928. Previous to this time, the traditional view was that $\gamma\text{'}\text{p}\text{z}$ referred to the northern skies. Thus, the verse was assumed to be a description of God's heavenly realm and perhaps His creation activities. Many scholars continue to hold this celestial view of $\gamma\text{'}\text{p}\text{z}$. Records from Ugarit, and its surroundings, however, reveal a very common view of the north as the particular abode of mythological gods. The storm god, Baal, was said to inhabit a particular mountain with the name of $\gamma\text{'}\text{p}\text{z}$. Thus, the view has arisen that $\gamma\text{'}\text{p}\text{z}$, as well as certain other Old Testament words, derive directly from the Ancient Near Eastern context in which they were written. A "mythological hermeneutic" weighs the possible significance of Canaanite words and traditions to OT interpretation. In this sense, $\gamma\text{'}\text{p}\text{z}$ in Job 26:7 may refer to a literal northern "cosmic mountain" that still exists today on the Mediterranean coast, instead of to the heavens above. According to Psalm 48:2, the Israelites may have transferred

this original cosmic significance to Mount Zion where all glory was given to God.

Six arguments were presented in favor of the terrestrial view of $\gamma\dot{\imath}\text{פ}\ddot{\text{צ}}$. First and second, the words and phrases used in Job show multiple similarities to the Ugaritic tablets. In particular, the "pillars of heaven" and בָּרָךְ appear in Ugaritic literature. By extension, the word $\gamma\dot{\imath}\text{פ}\ddot{\text{צ}}$ may have been borrowed in its description of the literal cosmic mountain of Baal. Third, parallels between Ugaritic records and Isaiah were described. In particular, the "Mount of the Assembly" is a recurrent theme. Isaiah uses this description for the throne of God. By implication, a divine gathering is then pictured as taking place on Mount $\text{\textcircled{S}ap\textcircled{O}n}$. Fourth, the word $\gamma\dot{\imath}\text{פ}\ddot{\text{צ}}$ in Job 26:7 may refer to God's conquest over Baal. The literal Mount $\text{\textcircled{S}ap\textcircled{O}n}$ is then a monument to God's power which appears in the creation context of Job 26:7. Fifth, the progression of thought in Job 26 moves from the lowest depths of earth to the highest heaven. In its position, $\gamma\dot{\imath}\text{פ}\ddot{\text{צ}}$ brings sequential harmony to the passage if it refers to an earthly mountain. Sixth, other parallel passages have been studied and appear to promote a terrestrial view of $\gamma\dot{\imath}\text{פ}\ddot{\text{צ}}$. Among the terrestrial arguments, the mythological backdrop of Job remains most important. Words and phrases from an Ancient Near Eastern context were evidently used and were understood by those who read the book. Continuing studies of correlations

between the Old Testament and Canaanite literature have shown that the mythological hermeneutic is no longer novel and uncertain, but instead is a very fruitful approach. The available data from extra-biblical sources can no longer be ignored. Due caution is needed for the danger of reading excessive mythological elements into Scripture. However, careful analysis of parallels have already greatly benefited OT studies. The word ןִפְּצָ may be yet another example of added insight gained from the contemporary literature.

Regarding the celestial view of ןִפְּצָ , seven arguments were also presented. First, the point was made that many Old Testament words have a mythological or symbolic etymology, including all four of the cardinal directions. If the door is opened to a mythological meaning for ןִפְּצָ in Job 26:7, one will simply not know when to again close the door upon a similar interpretation in other verses. Proper hermeneutical rules are lacking. It must be admitted, however, that ןִפְּצָ is a special case. The word stands for direction, but also names a significant mountain. The direction of north is in some special sense the direction of God's glory. This direction is repeatedly used with reference to His appearance and activity. Of course, caution is necessary in this emphasis on northern significance. There is certainly no scientific evidence for a literal, observable empty space in the northern sky. Space appears

to be infinite and abundantly filled with stars and galaxies in all directions. Second, the concept of God "stretching out the heavens" is common in the Old Testament. It is a natural and beautiful description of the Creator's activity. In this light, the terrestrial view of God stretching out a particular Mount Şāpôn may be an unwarranted limitation. This may well be the most significant argument supporting the celestial view of רָאִי־עֵלְיוֹת. It is countered by the question of why the Job emphasis is only on the creation of the northern sky. Parallel passages use the all-inclusive plural term, מִן־הַשָּׁמַיִם. The northern direction was shown to be apparently less significant than other regions of the sky. Third, Hebrew poetry tends to progress from the general to the particular. A description of the heavens (v. 7a) followed by the earth (v. 7b) is consistent with this pattern. Such antiparallelism is common in Hebrew poetry. The terrestrial view of רָאִי־עֵלְיוֹת would oppose the pattern. Fourth, the word associated with רָאִי־עֵלְיוֹת, אֲרָצָה is used elsewhere in Scripture for describing the expanse of the heavens. It is not used in reference to mountains or other parts of the earth. Fifth, some have tried to relate the רָאִי־עֵלְיוֹת of Job 26:7 with other references in the same book to the northern constellations. In this view, רָאִי־עֵלְיוֹת is sometimes thought to refer to the north star. A number of serious difficulties arose with this point: The verse, Job 26:7, cannot readily be taken as a reference to certain

northern stars. Furthermore, the verse cannot be connected with false science rumors regarding absolute voids or empty places in the northern direction of heaven. Sixth, some feel that גִּפְזָ may refer to the cloud formations and wind of the northern regions. This idea certainly fits the probable verb root, גִּפְזָ , to hide or to treasure. That is, the north carried the connotation of a dark or stormy place. The people of the Ancient Near East certainly looked to the north as the source of rain and wind which worked to clear southern skies. Seventh, the גִּפְזָ that גִּפְזָ is placed upon could be the expanse of northern sky. On the other hand, the word גִּפְזָ also is a perfect description of the popular view of regarding connections with the underworld in the roots of Mount Sapon. These points promote the celestial view for גִּפְזָ . Some are quite questionable; the second and the sixth, in particular, are strong arguments. One begins to feel that there are as many points of consideration as there are writers on the subject!

A Tentative Solution

One wants to arrive at a conclusion for the meaning of גִּפְזָ in Job 26:7, while acknowledging the evidence for both sides of the issue. For those who accept the terrestrial view of גִּפְזָ in Job 26:7, there is one additional factor of support which also acknowledges the

celestial view.¹ Bald Mountain, the present name of the original Mount Şāpôn, has an elevation of 5800 feet (1770 meters) above sea level. It is so named in modern times because of its snow-covered peak, the highest in northern Syria. Air that is pushed up the windward side of the mountain by "orographic uplift" expands and cools with a resulting condensation of moisture. Therefore, this mountain, as well as many others in Palestine and around the world, is often partially shrouded in clouds and haze. The effect is especially apparent on Mount Şāpôn for two reasons. First, the mountain is located directly on the Mediterranean coast where it encounters humid on-shore breezes. Secondly, the salt water sea provides plentiful condensation nuclei for the formation of clouds as the humid air moves upward. In many cases, the peak of the mountain is clearly visible above this partial lower altitude obscuration. Hence, it actually looks as though the peak of the mountain is floating freely in the air. Jacob shows a photograph of the partially cloud-covered peak.² This frequent dramatic appearance could be a partial reason why mythological ideas arose concerning such mysterious heights. Eissfeldt concludes that $\gamma\acute{\iota}\beta\Upsilon$ in Job 26:7 must be thought of as a

¹Roberts, "ŞĀPÔN in Job 26:7," p. 557.

²Edmond Jacob, Ras Shamra Et L'Ancien Testament (Neuchâtel, Switzerland: Delachaux Et Niestlé, 1960), p. 111.

mountain, with its peak standing and shining in the heavens.¹ Baal as "rider of the clouds" in Ugaritic writings had his home in these cloud-shrouded regions. The mountain peak indeed looks as though it is supernaturally suspended between heaven and earth. The appearance of such clouded mountains still today gives rise to a unique sense of awe and wonder. Thus, the reference in Job 26:7 could refer to a terrestrial mountain which is at the same time seemingly suspended in the celestial sky. This view certainly fits all the criteria in a natural manner. As stated earlier, Israelites probably did not associate גִּבְעֹת in Job 26:7 with the Syrian mountain itself. Instead, as Psalm 48:2 indicates, they thought of their own Mount Zion as the central location.

In conclusion, the dual possibility remains for either a terrestrial or celestial interpretation of גִּבְעֹת in Job 26:7. For those who reject mythological language in the Old Testament, גִּבְעֹת in Job 26:7 may refer to the heavens. For others who accept the use of mythological words in Scripture, Mount Şāpôn is one of the most likely terms that could be expected to be used. In this case, גִּבְעֹת in Job 26:7 is a "down-to-earth" description of Mount Şāpôn in connection with its surrounding weather patterns. Considering the original polytheistic associations with

¹Eissfeldt, Baal Zaphon, Zeus Kasios, p. 13.

Mount Şāpôn, the writer then expresses a great truth in Job 26:7. He declares that God created even the sinister places or mountains of the gods, from nothing. Thus, no evil powers of earth or heaven above have any existence co-eternal with God.¹

Further Study

The basic issue of whether terms with a mythological intent are used in Scripture has not yet been decided to everyone's satisfaction. Continuing studies of parallels between extra-biblical literature and Scripture should clarify the situation. Studies of ancient tablets may also further define the meaning and root of 𐤔𐤓𐤏𐤍. It may even be shown eventually that Job 26:7 was a common expression of the time.

Early ideas regarding astronomy, meteorology, and sacred mountains can reveal much about Ancient Near Eastern cultures. The origin of these ideas remains obscure at present. Besides Mount Şāpôn, the particular mountain of El, and those of other gods as well, needs to be identified and analyzed for significance.

¹TWOT, 1980 ed., s.v. "Şāpôn," by John E. Hartley, 2:775.

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