
JOB 41: 1 "Can you draw out Leviathan with a fish hook, or press down his tongue with a cord?"

God's great power in the leviathan, of which creature he gives a very circumstantial description, vv. 1-34.

Verse 1

Canst thou draw out leviathan - We come now to a subject not less perplexing than that over which we have passed, and a subject on which learned men are less agreed than on the preceding. What is leviathan? The Hebrew word לִיָּאֶתִן livyathan is retained by the Vulgate and the Chaldee. The Septuagint have, Ἀξις δε δρακοντα; "Canst thou draw out the Dragon?" The Syriac and Arabic have the same. A species of whale has been supposed to be the creature in question; but the description suits no animal but the crocodile or alligator; and it is not necessary to seek elsewhere. The crocodile is a natural inhabitant of the Nile, and other Asiatic and African rivers. It is a creature of enormous voracity and strength, as well as fleetness in swimming. He will attack the largest animals, and even men, with the most daring impetuosity. In proportion to his size he has the largest mouth of all monsters. The upper jaw is armed with forty sharp strong teeth, and the under jaw with thirty-eight. He is clothed with such a coat of mail as cannot be pierced, and can in every direction resist a musket-ball. The Hebrew לֵי לֵי ten signifies the coupled dragon; but what this is we know not, unless the crocodile be meant.

With a hook - That crocodiles were caught with a baited hook, at least one species of crocodile, we have the testimony of Herodotus, lib. ii., c. 70: Ἐπεὶν νωτον σους δελεαση περι ακκιστρον, μεττει ες μεσον τον ποταμον, κ. τ. λ. "They take the back or chine of a swine, and bait a hook with it, and throw it into the midst of the river; and the fisherman stands at some distance on the shore holding a young pig, which he irritates, in order to make it squeak. When the crocodile hears this he immediately makes towards the sound; and, finding the baited hook in his way, swallows it, and is then drawn to land, when they dash mud into his eyes, and blind him; after which he is soon despatched."

In this way it seems leviathan was drawn out by a hook: but it was undoubtedly both a difficult and dangerous work, and but barely practicable In the way in which Herodotus relates the matter.

Or his tongue with a cord - It is probable that, when the animal was taken, they had some method of casting a noose round his tongue, when opening his mouth; or piercing it with some barbed instrument. Thevenot says that in order to take the crocodile they dig holes on the banks of the river, and cover them with sticks. The crocodiles fall into these, and cannot get out. They leave them there for several days without food, and then let down nooses which they pitch on their jaws, and thus draw them out. This is probably what is meant here.

JOB 41: 2 Can you put a rope into his nose, or pierce his jaw through with a hook?

Verse 2

Canst thou put a hook onto his nose? - Canst thou put a ring in his nose, and lead him about as thou dost thine ox? In the East they frequently lead thy oxen and buffaloes with a ring in their noses. So they do bulls and oxen in this country.

Bore his jaw through with a thorn? - Some have thought that this means, Canst thou deal with him as with one of those little fish which thou stringest on a rush by means of the thorn at its end? Or perhaps it may refer to those ornaments with which they sometimes adorned their horses, mules, camels, etc.

JOB 41: 3 Will he make many petitions to you, or will he speak soft words to you?

Verse 3

Will he make many supplications - There are several allusions in these verses to matters of which we know nothing.

JOB 41: 4 Will he make a covenant with you, that you should take him for a servant forever?

Verse 4

Will he make a covenant - Canst thou hire him as thou wouldst a servant, who is to be so attached to thy family as to have his ear bored, that he may abide in thy house for ever? Is not this an allusion to the law, Exo 21:1-6?

JOB 41: 5 Will you play with him as with a bird? Or will you bind him for your girls?

Verse 5

Wilt thou play with him - Is he such a creature as thou canst tame; and of which thou canst make a pet, and give as a plaything to thy little girls? נערוטיך naarotheycha; probably alluding to the custom of catching birds, tying a string to their legs, and giving them to children to play with; a custom execrable as ancient, and disgraceful as modern.

JOB 41: 6 Will traders barter for him? Will they part him among the merchants?

Verse 6

Shall thy companions make a banquet - Canst thou and thy friends feast on him as ye were wont to do on a camel sacrificed for this purpose? Or, canst thou dispose of his flesh to the merchants - to buyers, as thou wouldst do that of a camel or an ox? It is certain, according to Herodotus, lib. ii. c. 70, that they killed and ate crocodiles at Apollonople and Elephantis, in Egypt.

JOB 41: 7 Can you fill his skin with barbed irons, or his head with fish spears?

Verse 7

Canst thou fill his skin with barbed irons? - This refers to some kind of harpoon work, similar to that employed in taking whales, and which they might use for some other kinds of animals; for the skin of the crocodile could not be pierced. Herrera says that he saw a crocodile defend itself against thirty men; and that they fired six balls at it without being able to wound it. It can only be wounded under his belly.

JOB 41: 8 Lay your hand on him. Remember the battle, and do so no more.

Verse 8

Lay thine hand upon him? - Mr. Heath translates, "Be sure thou strike home. Mind thy blow: rely not upon a second stroke." Mr. Good translates: - "Make ready thy hand against him.

Dare the contest: be firm."

He is a dangerous animal; when thou attackest him, be sure of thy advantage; if thou miss, thou art ruined. Depend not on other advantages, if thou miss the first. Kill him at once, or he will kill thee.

JOB 41: 9 Behold, the hope of him is in vain. Won't one be cast down even at the sight of him?

Verse 9

Behold, the hope - If thou miss thy first advantage, there is no hope afterwards: the very sight of this terrible monster would dissipate thy spirit, if thou hadst not a positive advantage against his life, or a place of sure retreat to save thine own.

JOB 41: 10 None is so fierce that he dare stir him up. Who then is he who can stand before me?

Verse 10

None is so fierce that dare stir him up - The most courageous of men dare not provoke the crocodile to fight, or even attempt to rouse him, when, sated with fish, he takes his repose among the reeds. The strongest of men cannot match him.

Who then is able - If thou canst not stand against the crocodile, one of the creatures of my hand, how canst thou resist me, who am his Maker? This is the use which God makes of the formidable description which he has thus far given of this terrible animal.

JOB 41: 11 Who has first given to me, that I should repay him? Everything under the heavens is mine.

Verse 11

Who hath prevented me - Who is it that hath laid me under obligation to him? Do I need my creatures? All under the heavens is my property.

JOB 41: 12 "I will not keep silence concerning his limbs, nor his mighty strength, nor his goodly frame.

Verse 12

I will not conceal his parts - This is most certainly no just translation of the original. The Vulgate is to this effect: I will not spare him: nor yield to his powerful words, framed for the purpose of entreaty.

Mr. Good applies it to leviathan: - "I cannot be confounded at his limbs and violence;

The strength and structure of his frame."

The Creator cannot be intimidated at the most formidable of his own works: man may and should tremble; God cannot.

JOB 41: 13 Who can strip off his outer garment? Who shall come within his jaws?

Verse 13

Who can discover the face of his garment? - Who can rip up the hide of this terrible monster? Who can take away his covering, in order to pierce his vitals?

JOB 41: 14 Who can open the doors of his face? Around his teeth is terror.

Verse 14

The doors of his face? - His jaws which are most tremendous.

JOB 41: 15 Strong scales are his pride, shut up together with a close seal.

Verse 15

His scales are his pride - They are impenetrable, as we have already seen.

JOB 41: 16 One is so near to another, that no air can come between them.

Verse 16

One is so near to another - It has already been stated, that a musket-ball fired at him in any direction cannot make a passage through his scales.

JOB 41: 17 They are joined one to another. They stick together, so that they can't be pulled apart.

JOB 41: 18 His sneezing flashes out light. His eyes are like the eyelids of the morning.

Verse 18

By his sneezings a light doth shine - It is very likely that this may be taken literally. When he spurts up the water out of his nostrils, the drops form a sort of iris or rainbow. We have seen this effect produced when, in certain situations and state of the atmosphere, water was thrown up forcibly, so as to be broken into small drops, which has occasioned an appearance like the rainbow.

The eyelids of the morning - It is said that, under the water, the eyes of the crocodile are exceedingly dull; but when he lifts his head above water they sparkle with the greatest vivacity. Hence the Egyptians, in their hieroglyphics, made the eyes of the crocodile the emblem of the morning. Ανατολην λεγοντες δυο οφθαλμους κροκοδειλου ζωογραφουσι. - Horapp. Egypt. hieroglyph., lib. i., c. 65. This is a most remarkable circumstance, casts light on ancient history, and shows the rigid correctness of the picture drawn above. The same figure is employed by the Greek poets. Χρυσεας ημερας βλεφαρον. "The eyelid of the golden day."

Soph. Antig. ver. 103. Νυκτος αφεγγες βλεφαρον. "The darksome eyelid of the night."

Eurip. Phaeniss. ver. 553.

JOB 41: 19 Out of his mouth go burning torches. Sparks of fire leap out.

Verse 19

Out of his mouth go burning lamps - Dr. Young, in his paraphrase, has a sensible note on this passage: - "This is nearer the truth than at first view may be imagined. The crocodile, according to naturalists, lying long under water, and being there forced to hold its breath, when it emerges, the breath long repressed is hot, and bursts out so violently, that it resembles fire and smoke. The horse does not repress his breath by any means so long, neither is he so fierce and animated; yet the most correct of poets ventures to use the same metaphor concerning him, *volvitur sub naribus ignem*. By this I would caution against a false opinion of the boldness of Eastern metaphors, from passages ill understood."

JOB 41: 20 Out of his nostrils a smoke goes, as of a boiling pot over a fire of reeds.

JOB 41: 21 His breath kindles coals. A flame goes out of his mouth.

JOB 41: 22 There is strength in his neck. Terror dances before him.

Verse 22

In his neck remaineth strength - Literally, "strength has its dwelling in his neck." The neck is the seat of strength of most animals; but the head and shoulders must be here meant, as the crocodile has no neck, being shaped nearly like a lizard.

And sorrow is turned into joy before him - ולפניו תדוץ דאבה ulephanaiv taduts deabah; "And destruction exulteth before him." This is as fine an image as can well be conceived. It is in the true spirit of poetry, the legitimate offspring of the genie createur. Our translation is simply insignificant.

JOB 41: 23 The flakes of his flesh are joined together. They are firm on him. They can't be moved.

Verse 23

The flakes of his flesh - His muscles are strongly and firmly compacted.

JOB 41: 24 His heart is as firm as a stone, yes, firm as the lower millstone.

Verse 24

Hard as a piece of the nether millstone - Which is required to be harder than that which runs above.

JOB 41: 25 When he raises himself up, the mighty are afraid. They retreat before his thrashing.

Verse 25

By reason of breakings they purify themselves - No version, either ancient or modern, appears to have understood this verse; nor is its true sense known. The Septuagint have, "When he turns himself, he terrifies all the quadrupeds on the earth." The original is short and obscure: משברים יתחטאו mishshebarim yithchattau. Mr. Good takes the plural termination ם' im, from the first word, of which he makes the noun ם' yam, the sea, and thus translates it, "They are confounded at the tumult of the sea." In this I can find no more light than in our own. Mr. Heath has, "For very terror they fall to the ground." The translations of it are as unsatisfactory as they are various. I shall give both the verses from Coverdale: -

His herte is as harde as a stone; and as fast as the stythye (anvil) that the hammer man smyteth upon: when he goeth the mightiest off all are afayed, and the waives hevy. The dull swell in the waters proclaims his advance; and when this is perceived, the stout-hearted tremble.

JOB 41: 26 If one attacks him with the sword, it can't prevail; nor the spear, the dart, nor the pointed shaft.

Verse 26

Habergeon - The hauberk, the Norman armor for the head, neck, and breast, formed of rings. See on Neh 4:16 (note).

JOB 41: 27 He counts iron as straw; and brass as rotten wood.

JOB 41: 28 The arrow can't make him flee. Sling stones are like chaff to him.

JOB 41: 29 Clubs are counted as stubble. He laughs at the rushing of the javelin.

Verse 29

Darts are counted as stubble - All these verses state that he cannot be wounded by any kind of weapon, and that he cannot be resisted by any human strength. A young crocodile, seen by M. Maillet, twelve feet long, and which had not eaten a morsel for thirty-five days, its mouth having been tied all that time, was nevertheless so strong, that with a blow of its tail it overturned a bale of coffee, and five or six men, with the utmost imaginable ease! What power then must lodge in one twenty feet long, well fed, and in health!

JOB 41: 30 His undersides are like sharp potsherds, leaving a trail in the mud like a threshing sledge.

Verse 30

Sharp stones are under him - So hard and impenetrable are his scales, that splinters of flint are the same to him as the softest reeds.

JOB 41: 31 He makes the deep to boil like a pot. He makes the sea like a pot of ointment.

Verse 31

He maketh the deep to boil like a pot - This is occasioned by strongly agitating the waters at or near the bottom; and the froth which arises to the top from this agitation may have the appearance of ointment. But several travelers say that the crocodile has a very strong scent of musk, and that he even imparts this smell to the water through which he passes, and therefore the text may be taken literally. This property of the crocodile has been noticed by several writers.

JOB 41: 32 He makes a path shine after him. One would think the deep had white hair.

Verse 32

He maketh a path to shine after him - In certain states of the weather a rapid motion through the water disengages many sparks of phosphoric fire. I have seen this at sea; once particularly, on a fine clear night, with a good breeze, in a fast-sailing vessel, I leaned over the stern, and watched this phenomenon for hours. The wake of the vessel was like a stream of fire; millions of particles of fire were disengaged by the ship's swift motion through the water, nearly in the same way as by the electric cushion and cylinder; and all continued to be absorbed at a short distance from the vessel. Whether this phenomenon takes place in fresh water or in the Nile, I have had no opportunity of observing.

The deep to be hoary - By the frost and foam raised by the rapid passage of the animal through the water.

JOB 41: 33 On earth there is not his equal, that is made without fear.

Verse 33

Upon earth there is not his like - There is no creature among terrestrial animals so thoroughly dangerous, so exceedingly strong, and so difficult to be wounded or slain.

Who is made without fear - Perhaps there is no creature who is at all acquainted with man, so totally destitute of fear as the crocodile.

JOB 41: 34 He sees everything that is high. He is king over all the sons of pride."

Verse 34

He is a king over all the children of pride - There is no animal in the waters that does not fear and fly from him. Hence the Chaldee renders it, all the offspring of Fishes. Calmet says, that by the children of pride the Egyptians are meant; that the crocodile is called their king, because he was one of their principal divinities; that the kings of Egypt were called Pharaoh, which signifies a crocodile; and that the Egyptians were proverbial for their pride, as may be seen in Eze 32:12. And it is very natural to say that Job, wishing to point out a cruel animal, adored by the Egyptians, and considered by them as their chief divinity, should describe him under the name of king of all the children of pride.

Houbigant considers the לִיְיָתָן livyathan, the coupled dragon, to be emblematical of Satan: "He lifts his proud look to God, and aspires to the high heavens; and is king over all the sons of pride." He is, in effect, the governor of every proud, haughty, impious man. What a king! What laws! What subjects! Others think that Men are intended by the sons of pride; and that it is with the design to abate their pride, and confound them in the high notions they have of their own importance, that God produces and describes an animal of whom they are all afraid, and whom none of them can conquer.

After all, what is leviathan? I have strong doubts whether either whale or crocodile be meant. I think even the crocodile overrated by this description. He is too great, too powerful, too important, in this representation. No beast, terrestrial or aquatic, deserves the high character here given, though that character only considers him as unconquerably strong, ferociously cruel, and wonderfully made. Perhaps leviathan was some extinct mammoth of the waters, as behemoth was of the land. However, I have followed the general opinion by treating him as the crocodile throughout these notes; but could not finish without stating my doubts on the subject, though I have nothing better to offer in the place of the animal in behalf of which almost all learned men and critics argue, and concerning which they generally agree. As to its being an emblem either of Pharaoh or the devil, I can say little more than, I doubt. The description is extremely dignified; and were we sure of the animal, I have no doubt we should find it in every instance correct. But after all that has been said, we have yet to learn what leviathan is!