

Leviathan and Behemoth

Introduction

These words refer to unknown animals mentioned in the Bible. Usually translators and commentaries interpret them as something we are familiar with, such as a crocodile, whale or hippopotamus. But are these sensible interpretations?

In this paper I seek to analyse the words used and the context of the texts and try to identify what is meant.

Leviathan

May those curse it who curse the day, those who are ready to arouse Leviathan. Job 3:8

Can you draw out Leviathan with a hook, or snare his tongue with a line which you lower? Can you put a reed through his nose, or pierce his jaw with a hook? Will he make many supplications to you? Will he speak softly to you? Will he make a covenant with you? Will you take him as a servant forever? Will you play with him as with a bird, or will you leash him for your maidens? Will your companions make a banquet of him? Will they apportion him among the merchants? Can you fill his skin with harpoons, or his head with fishing spears? Lay your hand on him; remember the battle -- Never do it again! Indeed, any hope of overcoming him is false; shall one not be overwhelmed at the sight of him? No one is so fierce that he would dare stir him up. Job 41:1-10

I will not conceal his limbs, His mighty power, or his graceful proportions. Who can remove his outer coat? Who can approach him with a double bridle? Who can open the doors of his face, With his terrible teeth all around? His rows of scales are his pride, shut up tightly as with a seal; One is so near another that no air can come between them; they are joined one to another, they stick together and cannot be parted. His sneezings flash forth light, and his eyes are like the eyelids of the morning. Out of his mouth go burning lights; sparks of fire shoot out. Smoke goes out of his nostrils, as from a boiling pot and burning rushes. His breath kindles coals, and a flame goes out of his mouth. Strength dwells in his neck, and sorrow dances before him. The folds of his flesh are joined together; they are firm on him and cannot be moved. His heart is as hard as stone, even as hard as the lower millstone. When he raises himself up, the mighty are afraid; because of his crashings they are beside themselves. Though the sword reaches him, it cannot avail; nor does spear, dart, or javelin. He regards iron as straw, and bronze as rotten wood. The arrow cannot make him flee; slingstones become like stubble to him. Darts are regarded as straw; he laughs at the threat of javelins. His undersides are like sharp potsherds; he spreads pointed marks in the mire. He makes the deep boil like a pot; he makes the sea like a pot of ointment. He leaves a shining wake behind him; one would think the deep had white hair. On earth there is nothing like him, which is made without fear. He beholds every high thing; he is king over all the children of pride. Job 41:12-34

You divided the sea by Your strength; You broke the heads of the sea serpents in the waters. You broke the heads of Leviathan in pieces, and gave him as food to the people inhabiting the wilderness. Ps 74:13-14 [Many believe that this passage is actually figurative referring to the overthrow of Pharaoh and his army at the Red Sea.]

This great and wide sea, In which are innumerable teeming things, Living things both small and great. There the ships sail about; there is that Leviathan which You have made to play there. Ps 104:25-26

In that day the LORD with His severe sword, great and strong, will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent, Leviathan that twisted serpent; and He will slay the reptile that is in the sea. Isa 27:1

Commentators usually state that it is a crocodile being described here. Is that true?

Note some factors regarding this beast:

- It cannot be captured by fishing with hooks.
- It cannot be trained.
- It is not eaten.
- Harpoons are ineffective against it.
- No one dare stir it up.
- It lives in the sea.
- It is a serpent, a reptile.
- It is covered in impenetrable scales.
- It has limbs, head, neck, eyes, nose, jaw, mouth, teeth and tongue.
- It is described as breathing fire and smoke.

This cannot refer to a crocodile. Crocodiles live in rivers, lakes and swamps. There are saltwater crocodiles but these do not inhabit the great seas. Crocodiles are regularly eaten and they can be caught with fishing hooks and harpoons.

It cannot refer to a whale because it is stated to be a reptile and it has scales. Also harpoons are effective against whales. Whales were rarely observed in the Mediterranean.

The Hebrew word used is *l'v'yathān* (Strong's 3882). It is transliterated as 'leviathan', and may mean: sea monster, dragon, a large aquatic animal, perhaps the extinct dinosaur, plesiosaurus; the exact meaning is unknown. The root sense in the word is 'twisted' or 'coiled' or 'folded'. For this reason some commentators believed it to be a giant snake. Some take it from *lewy* 'joined' (referring to its joined, plate armour like scales) and then a monster drawn out, i.e. long; or else Arabic *lavah* 'to twist'.

Figuratively and poetically, Leviathan represents every foe of Israel and the church. Antotypically and finally Satan 'the dragon, that old serpent, which is the devil' (Rev 20:2, 10),

The Bible seeks to emphasise the extraordinary characteristics of this dragon that put it well outside of the ordinary realm of wild animals encountered by men. It is not something that is common or familiar to everyone. This rules out crocodiles that everyone in Egypt and the surrounding area was familiar with. Crocodiles were constantly encountered in the Nile and these were sometimes caught and eaten. There are even ancient stories claiming that they could be tamed and trained. Crocodiles were also known to occur in at least one river of Palestine, the Zarka, North of Jaffa.

It is much more likely that Leviathan refers to a giant reptile of some sort; either a dragon (unlikely as it is a sea animal; although some dragons were said to spend time in the sea), kraken or perhaps a dinosaur now extinct.

Dragons are referred to in history in every country on Earth. There are various types given different names, such as the Wyvern, which appears in heraldry as a winged two-legged dragon with a barbed tail. The word origin is the late Middle English (denoting a viper):

from Old French *wivre*, from Latin *vipera*. Welsh dragons are more reptilian while Chinese dragons are snake-like.

There are multiple legends telling how such dragons were slain yet there is no reason to dismiss this as fable. Claims of giant reptiles were originally dismissed as legendary until skeletons of Allosaurus and T-Rex, and suchlike, were dug up. Scientists refused to believe that extinct animals of the dinosaur period could possibly exist today until coelacanths were found to be routinely caught and eaten in Madagascar.¹ Giant squids were once dismissed but are now studied. Sea serpents were dismissed until oarfish were discovered.²

This animal is a large invincible reptile that thrived in the sea and is now extinct. It could be a plesiosaur³ or similar animal.

Behemoth

Look now at the behemoth, which I made along with you; he eats grass like an ox. See now, his strength is in his hips, and his power is in his stomach muscles. He moves his tail like a cedar; the sinews of his thighs are tightly knit. His bones are like beams of bronze, his ribs like bars of iron. He is the first of the ways of God; Only He who made him can bring near His sword. Surely the mountains yield food for him, And all the beasts of the field play there. He lies under the lotus trees, In a covert of reeds and marsh. The lotus trees cover him with their shade; The willows by the brook surround him. Indeed the river may rage, Yet he is not disturbed; He is confident, though the Jordan gushes into his mouth, Though he takes it in his eyes, Or one pierces his nose with a snare. Job 40:15-24

See also: Deut 28:26; 32:24; Isa 18:6; Hab 2:17, where it is not rendered 'behemoth' but 'beasts'.

The word is Strong's 0930 תַּמְהוֹם. *b@hemowth* in form a plural of 0929, but really a singular of Egyptian derivation. Thus some have supposed this to be an Egyptian word meaning a 'water-ox'. Perhaps an extinct dinosaur e.g. a diplodocus or brachiosaurus, the exact meaning is unknown.

The characteristics of this animal are:

- It eats grass like an ox.
- Its strength is in his hips, and his power is in his stomach muscles.
- It moves its tail like a cedar, thus it cannot be a hippopotamus.
- The sinews of its thighs are tightly knit.

¹ Coelacanth: A species of fish, *Latimeria chalumnae*, that is the sole living representative of a group of lobefinned bony fishes which flourished from the Devonian to the end of the Cretaceous periods (408–66 million years ago). Coelacanths are well known as fossils, and were thought to be extinct, until December 1938, when a specimen was caught off the mouth of the Chalumna River, South Africa. Since then, many specimens have been caught around the Comoro Archipelago, near Madagascar. The living coelacanth grows to 1.9 m (6 feet) in length, and lives at depths of 150–400 m (500–1,300 feet) on near-vertical underwater cliffs. [Oxford World Encyclopaedia.]

² A species of fish, *Regalecus glesne*, distributed worldwide in the open sea, living mainly in mid-water at depths of 300–600 m (975–1,950 feet). Its long, compressed, silvery body, up to 7 m (23 feet) in length, and deep red fins may have given rise to some reports of sea-serpents, when the fish was near the surface. It feeds mainly on small, mid-water euphausiid shrimps. [Oxford World Encyclopaedia.]

³ A large fossil marine reptile of the Mesozoic era, with a broad flat body, large paddle-like limbs, and typically a long flexible neck and small head. [New Oxford Dictionary.]

- His bones are like beams of bronze, his ribs like bars of iron; that is very strong and hard.
- He is the first of the ways of God; only He who made him can bring near His sword.
- It thrives on the mountains.
- It lies under the lotus trees, in a covert of reeds and marsh. The lotus trees cover him with their shade.
- The river may rage, yet it is not disturbed; it is confident, though the Jordan gushes into his mouth.

Most commentators say that this refers to the Hippopotamus but this cannot be true. For a start this animal has a large powerful tail. Although Hippos are found in Egypt, they are not found in Canaan.

This animal must be an extinct sauropod. Nothing else fits the description⁴

Conclusion

Archaeology and palaeontology show us that in the distant past there was gigantism of plants and animals; dragonflies were once a metre across for example. This was chiefly during the pre-deluvian period when there was a very different climate. CO₂ levels were as high as 7,000ppm (today 420), the atmosphere was different and the climate tropical.

The change of climate after the cataclysm of the flood and the start of rain and snow resulted in a mass extinction of dinosaurs and others that could not survive the new climatic conditions; neither would there be so much food available. However, some large animals continued for centuries (ancestors being preserved in the Ark) because evidence in rock formations shows this. Also all civilisations have records of large animals that roamed around, sometimes called by names such as dragons, wyverns and such like.

There was evidence of a plesiosaur dredged up by Japanese fishermen, affirmed to be such by an expert on board – but this was destroyed. Pictures of its rotting corpse remain. Reports of dinosaur-like creatures continue to arise in places like central Africa. [The Loch Ness monster is highly unlikely to be a plesiosaur because the waters are far too cold.] Also creatures thought long extinct, such as the coelacanth, continue to emerge. Oarfish 30 feet long have been captured in South East Asia, which could easily pass for a sea serpent. The giant squid was once thought to be a myth but now it is commonly encountered by submersibles and some have washed up on beaches.

In addition scientists are discovering new species all the time, especially in the deep waters of the ocean. Some of these species are fantastic in their characteristics, such as body luminescence or light sources over their head. The ocean depths have animals that are far more exotic and stretch the imagination far more than a plesiosaur and a brachiosaurus surviving to the time of Job.

There is nothing unscientific in affirming that large creatures once existed along with man that are now extinct. Indeed, there are footprints of both together in many rock formations around the world, such as a human footprint next to a T-Rex or hadrosaur⁵ footprint.

⁴ A very large quadrupedal herbivorous dinosaur with a long neck and tail, small head, and massive limbs; like an Apatosaurus (formerly Brontosaurus).

Therefore, the idea that Job witnessed such creatures is not in the least bit contentious.

The Bible affirms that dinosaurs existed with man and were created in the Creation week. Evolutionary theory affirming that they are separated by millions of years is a fraud.

So God created great sea creatures and every living thing that moves, with which the waters abounded, according to their kind, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. Gen 1:21 [Day 5.]

Then God said, 'Let the earth bring forth the living creature according to its kind: cattle and creeping thing and beast of the earth, *each* according to its kind'; and it was so. And God made the beast of the earth according to its kind, cattle according to its kind, and everything that creeps on the earth according to its kind. And God saw that *it was* good. Gen 1:24-25 [Day 6.]

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⁵ A large herbivorous mainly bipedal dinosaur of the late Cretaceous period, with jaws flattened like the bill of a duck.