The Famous but Difficult Psalm 90:10*

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ABSTRACT

Application of standard text-critical tools to the difficult Ps 90:10 results in the interpretation: The days of our vigor are seventy years, or Our years with might are eighty years, And their pride is vexation and sorrow. We fade quickly, and we rattle . . . . It is being claimed that the last colon of MT is a minor textual corruption of the original וְנִפְחִישׁ נָגֺז, and the rattle is the typical death groan.

Keywords: Ps 90:10, longevity, transience, death rattle.

A INTRODUCTION

Chapter 90, the first in the fourth book of the Book of Psalms, has been described by Jens as

A puzzling text, contradictory and dark, hopeful and somber, merciless and gentle. A song of dying and a word of life—a psalm marked equally by fear and trust, of terrible death and tender friendship, lament and praise, wrathful judgment and hymnal eulogy.¹

It gained much notoriety because parts of two of its verses (vv. 4 and 10) became colloquial elements.

Chapter 90 is also distinguished by a heading that identifies its author as the venerated Israelite leader Moses.² The heading indicates that the psalm is a “prayer” (תפלה). Relatively recent studies seem to concur with this assessment. Commentators described this psalm as dealing with God’s and man’s time, and as lamenting in esse the transience of human beings.³ A number of scholars, however, noted that reference to “seventy years” (v. 10) is usually associated in the Tanach with a national calamity (Jer 25:11-12, Zech 1:12). This consideration, among others, led them to the perception that ch. 90 is “a lament at the

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² Moses’ name occurs in a heading only here. It occurs also in chs. 90-106. Already Augustine opined that Moses could not have written the psalm because it does not contain any distinctive Mosaic expressions. Cf. John Goldingay, Psalm 90-150 (vol. 3 of Psalms; BCOT; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 23, note 28.

community’s historical experience in which wisdom have been utilized to formulate a lament that leads to a plea.”

This study is focused on the well-known v. 10 in ch. 90, which reads,

*The span of our lives is seventy years,*

*Or, given the strength, eighty years;*

*But the best of them are trouble and sorrow.*

*They pass by speedily, and we are in darkness,*

and has posed considerable difficulties to commentators since the time of the Versions. Seybold simply observes that: “der Sinn dieses Verses ist Dunkel.”

Whatever thematic perspective is adopted, the strange occurrence of the pronominal בָהֶם in the first colon baffles. Duhm observed:

Wenn der Dichter בָהֶם, ihrer sind, geschrieben hätte, so hätte er sich erstens Schlecht un prosaisch ausgedruckt und zweitens etwas Unrichtiges gesagt, den “unser” Leben währt keineswegs im durchschnitt, sondern nur in den seltener Fällen siebentzig Jahre.

Reider, a more recent scholar, noted that בָהֶם in Ps. xc 10 cannot be pronominal, and yet the ancient versions render it so. . . . Emendations, of course, are not lacking: some suggest בַּחיֵם, others read גַּבֵּהֶם; but it is obvious that none of these can be the original reading.

The preceding NJPS translation deletes בָהֶם, notes that the meaning of the hapax legomenon בָהֶם is uncertain (“best of them”?), assumes that the hapax legomenon יְמֵי־שְׁנֵינוּ means “speedily,” and renders the difficult יְמֵי־שְׁנֵינוּ by “and we are in darkness.” The careful reader would also notice that יְמֵי־שְׁנֵינוּ is problematic. The NJPS elegantly renders יְמֵי־שְׁנֵינוּ by “the span of our lives.” However, the Hebrew equivalent of “the span of our lives” is כל ימי חיינו (Isa 38:20). The last word in the verse (יִשָּׁה) is also problematic. It is doubtful that the NJPS translation “and we are in darkness (equivalent to Hebrew יִשָּׁה נעֲפָה)” reflects יִשָּׁה נעֲפָה.

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6 D. Bernhardt Duhm, *Die Psalmen erklärt* (Freiburg: Mohr, 1899), 226.
The purpose of this study is to suggest resolution of the noted difficulties using standard text-critical tools. In this context, it is being argued that 10αα-10αβ is a conflation of two common sayings: *(the days of our vigor [are] seventy years)*, and *(Our years with might [are] eighty years)*. The conflated statement שַׁנֵּחַנוּ שָׁעִים עַשְׁנֵים שָׁנָה (the days of our vigor [are] seventy years), and שָׁנַתֵּנוּ בְּרָחוֹב שָׁמִים שָׁנָה (Our years with might [are] eighty years). The conflated statement שַׁנֵּחַנוּ שָׁעִים עַשְׁנֵים שָׁנָה was meant by the author to be perhaps understood: “The days, years [with/in] vigor, [are] seventy years. And, if with might, [are] eighty years.” It is, however, an awkward Hebrew sentence; as conflated verses are usually. In final evolution of the verse, a copyist might have incorrectly copied שָׁנַתֵּנוּ instead of שַׁנֵּחַנוּ. Such an error would have been in particular likely if the copying was from a densely written scroll, and it was probably enhanced by the awkwardness of the conflated text. Finally, the last colon of MT is understood as being a minor textual corruption of the original נִנְחַלְתָּנוּ בְּרָחוֹב שָׁמִים (We fade quickly, and we rattle . . . ).

**B ANALYSIS**

1 Ancient Versions

It seems that in context with vv. 7-9 Septuagint understands v. 10 as referring to the transience of human beings, which is caused by divine corrective measures. It renders v. 10:

*[As for] the days of our years, in them are seventy years; and if [men should be] in strength, eighty years; and the greater part of them would be labor and trouble; for weakness overtakes us, and we shall be chastened. (AE ἡµέραι τῶν ἐτῶν ἡµῶν ἐν αὐτοῖς ἐβδοµήκοντα ἔτη, ἐάν δὲ ἐν δυναστείας, ὀγδοήκοντα ἔτη, καὶ τὸ πλείον αὐτῶν κόπος καὶ πόνος ὅτι ἐπῆλϑε πραΰτης ἐφ’ ἡµᾶς, καὶ παιδευϑησόµεϑα).*  

It takes ימי = “the days” (ἡµέραι); שַׁנֵּחַנוּ = “our years” (ἐτῶν ἡµῶν); בָּהֶם = “in them” (ἐν αὐτοῖς); שָׁנָה = “seventy years” (ἐβδοµήκοντα ἔτη); שָׁנָה = “eighty years” (ὀγδοήκοντα ἔτη); וְרָהְבָּם = “and the greater part of them (or, what is more than these)” (καὶ τὸ πλείον αὐτῶν), apparently reading וְרֻבָּם (Deut 7:7, Hos 4:7) instead of MT וְרָהְבָּם; עָמָל = “labor” (κόπος); וָאָוֶן = “and trouble” (καὶ πόνος); כִּי־גָז = “for weakness overtakes us” (ὅτι ἐπῆλϑε πραΰτης ἐφ’ ἡµᾶς), a paraphrase of MT; and, וְתָנוּכָה = “and we shall be chastened” (καὶ παιδευϑησόµεϑα), giving וְתָנוּכָה an unattested meaning.

Targum (Jonathan) understands v. 10 as describing man’s longevity in this world. It translates:

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The days of years in this world [are] seventy years summoning strength, and if mighty eighty years, and they [are] mostly labor and lying to debtors, for they pass in a hurry and fly as morning.

Targum (Jonathan) takes יְמֵי = “days” (יומי; 10) adds מַתָאָלְמִין = “summoning strength”; as the Septuagint takes וְרָהְבָּם = “and they [are] mostly” (יוָאָוֶן; 10); understands יָבָא = “they pass” (יוּדָע) and being a form of the verb גָּז = “they pass” (עדו); and, גָּז עִיּוֹךְ = “in a hurry” (בֶּסֶרַח); and, גָּז עִיּוֹךְ = “and fly as morning,” assuming that גָּז עִיּוֹךְ is a form of the verb עוף and completing the metaphor.

Peshitta considers v. 10 as describing the human condition. It translates: “The years of our life are three score and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet most of them are labor and sorrow; for life is soon cut off and we fly away.” 11 Peshitta seems to render יְמֵי = “years”; omit שְׁנוֺתֵינוּ = “our years”; add וְרָהְבָּם = “yet most of them” (יוָאָוֶן), perhaps reading וְרֻבָּם; gloss וְרָהְבָּם = “labor”; take שְׁנוֺתֵינוּ = “and sorrow”; add the word “life” to the last colon; understand יָבָא = “cut off” and being a form of the verb גָּז or גז; assume that the hapax legomenon חִישׁ = “soon” (מאבאו), perhaps understanding חיש as “pain and trouble”; and, translate יָבָא = “and we fly away.”

Finally, the Vulgate takes v. 10 as a statement of promise: at the end of life mildness will set in and man would be chastened. It renders:

The days of our years in them are threescore and ten years. But if in the strong they be fourscore years: and what is more of them is labor and sorrow. For mildness is come upon us: and we shall be corrected. (dies annorum nostrorum in ipsis septuaginta anni si autem multum octoginta anni et quod amplius est labor et dolor quoniam transivimus cito et avolavimus). 12

Vulgate takes יְמֵי = “days” (dies); שְׁנוֺתֵינוּ = “our years” (annorum nostrorum); בָהֶם = “in them” (in ipsis); וְרָהְבָּם = “and what is more of them” (et quod amplius), apparently reading as Septuagint שְׁנוֺתֵינוּ וְרָהְבָּם = “labor” (labor); יָבָא = “and sorrow” (et dolor); חִישׁ = “for mildness is come upon us”

9 Jastrow, 1298b. Jastrow suggests the more logical reading גָּז עִיּוֹךְ, which is adopted in the translation.
10 Jastrow, 71b. Jastrow raises the possibility that הבָהֶם is represented by מַתָאָלְמִין “summoning strength.”
12 The Vulgate translation into Latin is based on a Hebrew manuscript (Psalmi iuxta Hebraica), and the Douay-Rheims translation into English was used.
It seems that most of the Versions understand יְמֵי as “the days”; indeed, being followed by שְׁנוֺתֵינוּ that would be a reasonable translation. No clear guidance is provided by the Versions on the treatment of the pronominal בהם. All of the Versions consider רָהְבָּם as having the sense of וְרֻבָּם. However, it is not clear whether they had a different Vorlage, or considered וְרָהְבָּם simply having an extra ה. The last word in the verse (עַלָּנוּ, however, appears to have presented considerable challenges, both textual and thematic.

2 Classical Jewish Exegesis

Classical Jewish exegetes were concerned with the disagreement between the statement in v. 10a and Moses’ longevity of 120 years, and tried directly or implicitly to explain it. Rashi (1040-1105) connects thematically v. 10 to vv. 8-9.13 He understands בהם as referring to the עונותינו and מנוון that were mentioned in v. 8; explaining: These years, with these iniquities (עונותינו) and these sins of youth (עונו), they are seventy years. And if one’s years (ימיו) prevailed much they are eighty years. And the honor and rule (ורהבם) that one acquires in those years is inconsequential (עמל ואון) because of God’s anger (בעברתך כלינו) in v. 9) we quickly fly away and die (עַלָּנוּ). Rashi understands עַלָּנוּ = “they pass” and being a form of the verb גָּז (Nah 1:12, Num 11:31). He seems to be implying that man’s life is usually not longer than 70 or 80 years because of his sinning; that is, they could have been more (like those of Moses) otherwise.

Ibn Ezra (1089-c. 1164) notes that Moses’ living to 120 years cannot be used to deny him the authorship of this psalm. Moses simply summed up the experience of previous and his generation. Ibn Ezra has nothing to say about the first two cola and in particular about the awkward בהם. He assumes that רָהְבָּם = “(days of) power and strength,” which are the days of adulthood, and is undecided whether נופְּתָה refers to “wandering from place to place as a bird,” “we shall fly to dwell in the netherworld,” or “as a blink will be the days.” Qimchi (1160-1235) observes that Moses spoke not about his self but the majority of people. The generations in exile complain that they would not experience salvation because it is being delayed and life being so short. Qimchi does not explain the oddity of בהם. He takes רָהְבָּם = “their strengths (of the days)” (חזוק הימים), explaining “even if one is ripe in years, they are but toil and iniquity, and would not last”; for quickly as the bird flies we shall die. This metaphor is unusual in the Tanach.

13 The commentaries of classical Jewish exegetes are drawn from Rabbinic Bibles.
Menachem Meiri (1249 – c. 1310) understands v. 10a as saying: “The
days of our life, few among them (הימים) that are not the usual seventy years.
And if so naturally disposed, eighty years.”

Meiri explains: “Though Moses lived to 120 years he spoke prophetically about the future and in particular
about the exile.” In his view, רהבם = “the pride and power” (הגאות והשררה) of
the leaders and rich, מעלה = “naught” (הבל וריק), and נופת = “we shall fly (to
the grave).” Sforno (1470-1550) attaches v. 10a to the preceding verse, takes
רהבם = “their height and strength” (גבהם והזקם), עמל = “harassment of the
nations” (טרדת האומות), ואון = “daily needs” (צרכישעה), ונהפה = “we shall fly
(from this life).”

While classical Jewish exegesis has its parochial bent, it is obvious that
it struggled in its interpretation of v. 10 no less than the Versions. The
interpretations are tainted by personal experiences, but do not offer original
insights into the stated textual difficulties. As it will become clear in the next
section, modern exegesis did not fare any better.

3 Modern Exegesis

Modern exegesis found v. 10a challenging. The verse has been traditionally
understood as a statement on life expectancy. However, what is known on the
state of medicine in antiquity defies the stated longevity. Tate felt that
“conditional clauses in 10a and 10b seem more plausible,” making it a suitable
addendum to the material in vv. 7-9. Briggs, however, deletes v. 10a. In his view

A glossator inserted a prosaic statement as to the usual duration of
human life: In them are seventy, or if, by reason of extraordinary
might, eighty years. But it interrupts the thought and destroys the
measure of the original.

Verse 10, when taken by itself, seems to be a reflection about the transi-
ence of human life and a pessimistic assessment of its significance. Delitzsch, a
major 19th century commentator, translated v. 10 thus:

Die Tage unsere Jahre—ihre Summe ist siebenzig Jahr
Und, wenn gevaltig viel, achtzig Jahr,
Und ihr stoltz is Mühsal und nichtigkeit,

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14 Ha-Meiri מ라בי, Mikraot Gedolot (Jerusalem: Even Israel, 1992), 75.
15 Sforno ספורנו, Mikraot Gedolot (Jerusalem: Even Israel, 1992), 689.
16 Marvin E. Tate, Psalms 51-100 (WBC 20; Dallas: Word Books, 1990), 433. It is
fairly common to encounter in the Tanach conditional statements without an indicator
(אם).
17 Charles A. Briggs, The Book of Psalms (vol. 2; ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark,
1960), 275.
We shall use this translation as a baseline for our analysis of modern exegesis on v. 10.

• ימי־שנותינו = “the days of our years” (Die Tage unsere Jahre). ימי is the construct form of the plural of יום, “day.” However, the plural of יום could also mean “year” (1 Sam 2:19, Exod 13:10, Judg 11:14, 21:19, Isa 32:10). If ימי are “days,” then their number is usually more than seventy. If ימי are “years,” then the phrase becomes a meaningless repetition: “year of our years.” Whenever the phrase ימי שנותינו occurs in the Tanach, referring to a specific number, it is always followed by חיי (Gen 25:7, 47:8, 9, 2 Sam 19:35).19 Thus, ימי שנותינו is not a typical phrase in the Tanach; indeed, it never occurs.

Relying on Gen 47:8, some commentators assume that ימי־שנותינו means “the days of our life.”20 This would mean that שנותינו could have the sense “our life,” which is unattested in the Tanach.21 De Wette assumed a comma after ימי־שנותינו that implied a sense “as to the days of our years.”22 In this case one would anticipate a qualitative description to follow.

Müller says:

ימי־שנותינו בָּהֶם «die Tage ihrer (einzelnen) Jahre» am Anfang von V. 10 ist Glosse, die als eine Art casus pendens klären will, worauf sich das Pronominalsuffix des nächsten Wortes bezieht, und dazu die Hauptnomina von V. 9 aufnimmt und miteinander verbindet.23

This would shift all the problems associated with ימי־שנותינו בָּהֶם to v. 9b. Moreover, as Schreiner says: ימֵּה־שְּנֵּתֶנָּה als ‘Glosse’ streichen, hieße, den Satz v. 10a des Subj. berauben.”24 Finally, it is doubtful that a reader would have recognized this complicated syntax. Schreiner believes that “Der Ausdruck meint das, was wir unsere ‘Lebenszeit’

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18 Franz Delitzsch, Biblischer Kommentar über die Psalmen (5th ed.; Leipzig: Dörfling Franke, 1894), 590.
19 The open-ended ימי שנותינו can be found in Qoh 6, where it clearly refers to the days of a man’s life. Cf. Aron Pinker, “The ligature $v = של$ in Qohelet 6.3,” BT 62/3 (2011): 151-164.
20 Amos Hacham, תהלים חלק ב (Jerusalem: Mosad HaRav Kook, 1987), 164-165.
21 Only Prov 5:9, where параллел, might (perhaps) have this sense.
22 Wilhelm M. de Wette, Commentar über die Psalmen (4th ed.; Heidelberg: Mohr, 1836), 504.
nennen (vgl. Gen 47,8), wie ja der Plural yāmim des öfteren an die Stelle unseres Begriffes ‘Zeit’ tritt.”

• בהם = “their sum is” (ihre Summe). Meir Leibush ben Yecheil Michel (Malbim, 1809-1879) understands בהם as referring to the normal life span of seventy years; namely “if our years are in them (בהם), in the regular years (the word בהם referring to שנאתי), they would be seventy years.”

This nuance of שנאתי is, however, not attested in the Tanach. Delitzsch explains: “es sind darin befaßt 70 Jahre, sie begreifen, belaufen sich auf so viel.” Similarly de Wette translated by בהם ימי שנותינו “in ihnen sind siebenzig Jahr, bestehen in siebenzig Jahr.”

How-ever, that בהם = הם, is not attested in the Tanach, though some consider Ps 65:5 (ביה) and Ps 118:7 (בעזרו) as supporting the notion that a prefixed noun could have the same meaning as the noun. Moreover, it suggests the incorrect notion that man’s life span is at least seventy years.

Reider notes that when both first two colons are considered it becomes obvious that בהם is parallel to הב授權 and therefore must be either synthetic or antithetic to it. In his view,

הם has been misunderstood as a pronoun, while it should be construed as a noun. Assuming the root היה והם “discomfit,” we might read either בהם, if med. י, or בהם, if med. י, and render “in discomfiture.”

This suggestion leads to the phrase “The days of our years in discomfiture.”

Dahood takes בהם = “then (i.e., as a consequence of God’s fury).” He says:

For the meaning of בהם “hen, thereupon” see Isa 48:14 and Job 22:21. Its components seem to be בהם, “from, after,” andhem, “these,” hence “after these, then.” There is a possible occurrence in UT, 137:24, bhm yg’r b’al then Baal shouts.

Schreiner, “Erwägungen,” 85 note 31. However, in the quoted source the phrase...

Malbim, Mikraot Gedolot (Jerusalem: Even Israel, 1992), ad loc.

Delitzsch, Biblischer, 590. In support of this meaning, Delitzsch points to Pesiq. Rab Kah. 20a where יש is used. Obviously, יש בהם בהם ≠ יש בהם בהם.

De Wette, Commentar, 504.

Reider, “Etymological,” 123.

Mitchell J. Dahood, Psalms 1-50 (vol. 1 of Psalms; AB 16; Garden City: Double-day, 1968), 122.
However, Dahood’s etymological explanation is questionable, and the biblical sources cited in support are not compelling.

Schreiner finds the referents for בָּהֶם in vv. 7-9 and that the “grammatisch-syntaktischen Richtigkeit des bāhēm in v. l0aα ist also nicht zu zweifeln.” He says:

“Unsere Lebenszeit” umfaßt 70 Jahre, und zwar bāhēm “durch sie.” Das Suffix hier bezieht sich nicht auf die yāmîn, sondern knüpft an das an, was vorher an Gründen für die Kurzlebigkeit des Menschen aufgezählt worden ist: appākā, hamāl’kā (v. 7), “wônāënû, “lûmēnû (v. 8), ‘abrātākā (v. 9). “Durch diese” wird die Lebenszeit auf 70 Jahre begrenzt.31

However, when the preposition ב has a causal force it is never followed by a pronominal.

Müller says that “bhm ist mit Duhm, Gunkel, BHS u. a. zu gobhām »ihre Größe«.”32 This contention is not accurate, and the meaning “Größe” for גובָהּ is not attested in the Tanach. Hayot notes that some read כָּמָּה instead of MT בָּהֶם and obtain the introductory question ימי שנותינו כmah. While the emendation of בָּהֶם to כmah is minor, the resulting question is not attested in the Tanach, though it occurs frequently in the Talmud (e.g., bHagigah 11a).33 Krüger translates the three letter word בָּהֶם by “(betragen) von sich aus.” In his view “Das Suffix 3. masc. pl. in בָּהֶם wird am ehesten auf ימי שנותינו כmah zu be ziehen und die Wendung in Opposition zu בגבורת zu interpretieren sein.”34 Seybold has for בָּהֶם “unter ihnen,” but such sense the preposition ב is not attested in the Tanach.35

Hacham observes that ימי שנותינו בָּהֶם שבעים שנה makes ימי שנותינו be the specification sentence that means: In the days of our life there are seventy years.36 However, this sense can be obtained more cogently by writing ימי שנותינו שבעים שנה בָּהֶם. Goldingay notes that “one might take the proposition in bāhēm as b of identity (beth essentia).”37

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31 Schreiner, “Erwägungen,” 85.
36 Hacham, תהלים, 164-165.
37 Goldingay, Psalms 3, 20. Goldingay renders v. 10: “The days of our years in themselves are seventy years, // or, with strength eighty years. // But their bisterousness has been toil and trouble, // because it has passed quickly and we have
Grätz emends to הבים instead of MT בהים obtaining “Ihre Höhe sind siebenzig.”38 However, in the Tanach the noun hannoš never refers to “years.” Kraus is right saying: “BDuhm: בֵּנוֹת (‘ihr Gipfel’) wäre eine Bild, das dem Hebräer fremd sein dürfte.”39 Weiser apparently omits בהים in his rendering of v. 10a by “The years of our life are threescore and ten.”40 So does Kraus, saying: “בָּהֶם (‘in ihnen’) ist schwer verständlich und wohl metri causa zu streichen.”41 Tate felt that “the language in 10a need not be changed though it is awkward. The masculine suffix of ‘in them’ refers to the ‘days of the years’; not to the feminine ‘years’ alone.”42 Hossfeld and Zenger take בהם = “but,” which is unattested in the Tanach.43

• שבעים שנה = “seventy years” (siebenzig Jahr).45 Andersen notes that ‘seventy years’ could hardly be taken as the normal average age;46 rather it could be regarded as the normal limit of human life, and only a few individuals would live to see their seventieth birthday.47 An average life span of seventy was attained in relatively recent years, and that only in Western modern countries. However, the ancients had sufficient experience with various age-groups to meaningfully categorize them. For instance, a tablet from Sultantepe categorizes the stages of life from age 40 through age 90: 40—lalutu (“prime of life”); 50—umu kurutu (“short life”); 60—metlutu (“maturity”); 70—umu arkutu (“long life”); 80—sibutu (“old age”); and, 90—littutu (“extreme old age”).48 Zerafa

38 Heinrich Grätz, Kritischer Kommentar zu den Psalmen (Breslau: Schottlaender, 1882), ad loc.
39 Duhm, Psalmen, 226.
40 Hans-Joachim Kraus, Psalmen (vol. 2; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1966), 628.
42 Kraus, Psalmen 2, 628.
43 Tate, Psalms 51-100, 433.
44 Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, A Commentary on Psalms 51-100 (vol. 2 of Psalms; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 421.
45 Gabriel Barzilai, שביעים שנה: מרדכי קרמנצץ, זר ניירון, פנ utiliza, פרשנות אפוקליפטיקה, BM 59/2 (2014): 45. Many modern commentators note that the phrase שבעים שנה refers to a national calamity; a period of communal punishment, destruction, and exile. Barzilai argues that an analysis of the phrase שבעים שנה in Jer 25:11-12, 29:10, and Isa 23:15-17 links it to the domain of royal dynasties’ continuity and fall, rather than exile.
46 Ludwig Köhler, Der hebräische Mensch: eine Skizze (Tübingen: Mohr, 1953), 42-46.
47 Arnold A. Andersen, Psalms 73-150 (vol. 2 of The Book of Psalms; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 653.
argues that “The literary biblical evidence uniformly endorses Ps 90,10 [and hence, a seventy-year life expectancy] as a realistic statement.”

However, a “long life” was rarely achieved in ancient Israel. For instance, with the sole exception of David (1 Chr 29:28), none of the other Davidic kings reached the age of seventy. Malamat argues that in Ancient Israel a person could conceivably expect to live to see his great grandchildren. In his view “The assessment of longevity by a standard of four generations matches the Bible’s realistic appraisal of maximal life expectancy.”

A span of seventy years would allow seeing a maturing fourth generation.

- ואם בגבורת = “and when very many” (Und, wenn gevaltig viel), which de Wette characterizes as being “ohne beleg aus dem Sprachgebrauche.” Symmachus has “in unusual (case)” (ἐν παραδόξως). Delitzsch explains that

A similar division of life into stages occurs in b. Mo’ed Qat. (28a). It is notable that there too a span of fifty is considered short life and the term מותה כרת is used. The Gaon of Vilnius (GR’A) found support for the Talmudic perception that regular longevity is sixty years in a Gematria of ימי = 10+40+10. Cf. Ha-GRA, ליקוטי הגר״א Mikraot Gedolot (Jerusalem: Even Israel, 1992), 19. A more detailed division is presented in Pirqe Aboth 5:21.  


Köhler, Der hebräische Mensch, 48ff. Köhler estimates that in ancient Israel, a person could become a father at 19, and consequently be 57 at the birth of his first great-grandchild.

De Wette, Commentar, 504.

Delitzsch, Biblischer, 590. Delitzsch assumes that seventy, at most eighty years, was the average of the extreme age, which the Desert-dying generation could reach. However, it is doubtful that the psalm was penned by Moses the Exodus and that people could live that long in the harsh desert conditions. It is notable that only 40 years were required for a brand new generation to emerge.
Dahood gives והם בגבורת the colloquial sense “and if Heaven wills.” In Schreiner’s view, “Die Verlängerung des Lebens auf 80 Jahre ist allein der Unterstützung durch die ‘Taten YHWHs’ zu verdanken.” Similarly, Krüger has for ואם בגבורת “und wenn mit Krafttaten,” explaining that “Bei Krafttaten’ Gottes zu denken sein” (Ps 20:7, 106:2, 150:2, Deut 3:24). The words of Barzillai to David, when David invited him to stay with him in Jerusalem as a reward for his help during Absalom’s resurrection, give us a glimpse on the hardship of being old even for aristocrats. He says:

“I am this day eighty years old; and I cannot discern between luxury and simple living; neither can your servant taste what he eats or what he drinks. Nor can I hear anymore the voice of singing men or singing women. Why then should your servant be a burden to my lord the king?” (2 Sam 20:35).

- שמונים שנה = “eighty years” (achtzig Jahr). The numerical escalation “seventy … eighty” is not a simple poetic device for delimiting. Eighty years is not considered in the Tanach as being an unusually long life span. In Genesis (6:3) the maximal human longevity is set by the symbolic number 120=3x40. Pinker suggested that the termination of the rainy season in Babylon and the subsequent regeneration of the soil led to the notion that 40 was the right age for significant beginnings. From this evolved the concept of 40x2 as the length of human life, and 3x40 as the utmost length of human life.

Isaiah (65:20) and Ben Sira (18:9) imply that a hundred years count as a long life.

- רהבם = “and their pride” (Und ihr stoltz). The noun רָהֵב is a hapax legomenon, but the verb רָהַב “act stormily, boisterously, arrogantly,” is well attested in the Tanach and cognate Semitic languages. Delitzsch does not accept the possibility that רָהֵב is a corruption of רֻבָּם, as all the ancient Versions apparently read. In his view, the noun רָהָב (here רָהָב) is a hapax legomenon.

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54 De Wette, Commentar, 504.
55 Mitchell J. Dahood, Psalms 51-100 (vol. 2 of Psalms; AB 17; Garden City: Doubleday, 1968), 321 and 325.
56 Schreiner, “Erwägungen.” 85. Shreiner renders the first two cola: “Unsere Lebenszeit beträgt durch sie 70 Jahre, wenn aber ‘Gott will’ 80 Jahre.”
58 Dahood, Psalms 2, 325. Dahood seems to be thinking that we have here a typical numeric escalation.
60 The maximal age according to various Egyptian sources was 100 years, while the ideal lifetime was 110 years; i.e., a century plus a serene bonus granted to the worthy.
means “impetuosity, violence, vehemence” (Ungestüm) and in particular grandiose and ostentatious acts “das großthuerische Auftreten Iob 9,13. Jes. 30,7.”

Westerman is undecided with respect to הַרְהַבִּים “die Fülle (oder Höhe?, das Wort ist unsicher.” Dahood reads רְהָבִים “arrogance,” instead of MT רָהְבָּם.

Müller suggests

\[ w^\text{rohbām} \text{ } »\text{und ihr Drängen« am Anfang der folgenden Zeile, zu ergänzen (singgemäß: »ihr Maß«); das masc. Suffix kann sich dabei tatsächlich zumindest nicht allein auf šānênû »unsere Jahre« beziehen, da šānim wie šānā fem. ist (vgl. šā'ajim šānim 2Sam 2, 10). \]

Schreiner understands הַרְהַבִּים as “der Stolz des Lebens.” Krüger has for הַרְהַבִּים “but its urging” (aber ihr Drängen), which gives a thematically awkward text. Seybold says:

Ohne es letztlich beweisen zu können, möchte ich vermuten, dass הַרְהַבִּים nicht von רָהְבָּם abzuleiten ist, der nach den semantischen Äquivalenten offenbar die Grundbedeutung «eilen, drängen, stürmen» eigen ist, so dass das Nomen רָהְבָּם—auf eine schnelle Bewegung zu beziehen ist.

However, the notion of “quick movement” does not correspond well to כלול אמונות, or to v. 10b, as Seybold suggests. The notions כלול אמונות do not contain a time element, and attaching הַרְהַבִּים to v. 10b would overload it with repetitions of “quick movement.”

Goldingay notes that

For the hapax רֹהֲב. Versions imply רֹהֲב “breadth” (but it is doubtful whether this more common word makes better sense; the

62 Duhm, Psalmen, 226.
64 Dahood, Psalms 2, 325.
65 Müller, “Der 90. Psalm,” 274 note 49. In his view “w^rohbām bezieht sich wie gobhām‘ V. 10a auf jāmenûšānênû in V. 9.”
66 Schreiner, “Erwägungen.” 86. Schreiner renders the second hemistich: “Denn eilends verflieht er (der Stolz des Lebens), und wir fliegen ebenso dahin.”
68 Seybold, “Zeitvorstellungen,” 103.
years are long rather than wide), or the much common ṛōb, "abundance" (which looks even more like a simplification).\textsuperscript{69}

He has אֻמָּה = "but their boisterousness."

- עֵמל ואָוֶן = "toil and nothingness" (Mühsal und nichtigkeit). Cf. Ps 10:7, Job 4:8, 5:6, and Isa 10:1. In most of its occurrences (55), עֵמל means the "the burden of labor."\textsuperscript{70} Delitsch explains that all that during the life span was a source of pride, when correctly viewed is but עֵמל, in the sense that it is a burden and causes toil, and אָוֶן, because it is without true substance and value.\textsuperscript{71} This perspective is at odds with that of Wisdom literature, "Wisdom poetry, on the whole, praises the relatively rare phenomenon of aging as evidence of righteous behavior and physical vigor. [Where does the quotation end?] Terrien notes that "the sapiental atmosphere of this strophe [10-12] however finds longevity quite independent from happiness since it is 'only misery and inanity.'"\textsuperscript{72} De Wette has for אָוֶן "need, misery" (noth) (Ps 55:4).\textsuperscript{73} One can find in Lexica that אָוֶן means: distress one causes another; injustice toward another; trouble, discomfort; iniquity, sin; lie, deceit; and, delusion, especially by idols and their cults and oracles.\textsuperscript{74} Krüger has for עֵמל ואָוֶן "toil and mischief" (Mühsal und Unheil).\textsuperscript{75} Seybold takes עֵמל אָוֶן = "tiring" (mühsam) and "bad" (schlimm).\textsuperscript{76} Hacham understands here עֵמל אָוֶן = "pain and suffering" (ממאובים וה裡יק) and אָוֶן = "vanity and naught" (הבּל והריק).\textsuperscript{77}

- כי־גז = "it went past"(Den es fuhr vorüber). The verb גּוּז (kindred to גּוּז "to cut") means in all the Semitic dialects "to pass." It can refer to ימי־שנותינו or to רְהֵבם. The singular perfect גּוּז does not fit all the plurals in the verse. Qimchi takes it as being impersonal, but this is not satisfactory. The word גּוּז stands out as the only singular term in the verse.

- חִישׁ = "hastily" (eilends). The hapax legomenon חִישׁ is the infinitive adverb of the verb חִישׁ or חִישׁ (Deut 32:35, Ps 71:12). Malbim explains כי־גז חִישׁ by describing the quick passage of time. He says that כי־גז חִישׁ refers to "the flow of time that hastily speeds in its run and disappears

\textsuperscript{69} Goldingay, Psalms 3, 20.
\textsuperscript{70} S. Schwertner, "‘אָמָל »Mühsal«," THAT 2: 332.
\textsuperscript{71} Delitzsch, Biblischer, 591.
\textsuperscript{72} Samuel Terrien, The Psalms, Strophic Structure and Theological Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 644.
\textsuperscript{73} De Wette, Commentar, 504.
\textsuperscript{74} Anthony A. Bevan, "The Hebrew Words אָוֶן, אוּן, and אִיד", JP 26 (1899): 300-302.
\textsuperscript{75} Krüger, “Psalm 90,” 194.
\textsuperscript{76} Seybold, “Zeitvorstellungen,” 103.
\textsuperscript{77} Hacham, תהלים, 164-165.
from existence each second; since constantly present moments become past moments.”  

In that case the author could have said בֹּאַ֣ו תְחִלָּ֣ת הָדוֹמֶ֔ן, “comes to an end” (enteilt); obtaining “Denn es lauft, enteilt.”  

Dahood argues that the meaning of חִישׁ should be derived from the root חָשׁ, “to rejoice” (Ugaritic ħš, “joy, pleasure”), and perhaps used in Qoh 2:25.  

Duhm seems to be reading חָשׁ or חִישׁ instead of הַחִישׁ (untwist); obtaining “for the doubtful ἀπ. λεγ. one says perhaps with Bickel u.a. חָשׁ.”  

Dahood, Psalms 2, 325.

The “ah” ending is more common for the 1st person singular than for the 1st person plural.

De Wette, Commentar, 504.

Schreiner, “Erwägungen,” 86.

Anderson, Psalms 2, 653.


Kügelgen, “Psalm 90,” 194.

Seybold, “Zeitvorstellungen,” 103. Cf. Job 7:6 and Isa 38:12. However, neither of the sources, used by Seybold in support of his understanding of ונעפה, mentions “flying” or uses the root עֹף.

Kügelgen has for ונעפה “then we have [already] flown away” (dann sind wir [schon] davongeflogen). This interpretation of the hapax legomenon leaves many questions unanswered. Seybold observes that

natürlich die Vorstellung vom Fliegen (nicht so sehr des Pfeils oder Vogels), vielmehr vom «Schuss» der Garnspule, die sich immer weiter abwickelt. Der feste Bildkreis des Verses könnte der Grund dafür sein, weshalb eine Vergleichspartikel fehlt.
It is very difficult to see how «Schuss» der Garnspule could be associated with נפש. Malbim struggled with the notion of “time” and assumed that “time” = “human life” (חיי האדם). As each moment of time passes so also does human life pass to the domain of nothingness (תחום האפס). Hacham suggests that time and space fly quickly and we fly with it and disappear. This cosmological notion makes no sense.

Even this partial analysis of the exegesis on v. 10 suggests a fundamental dichotomy. It seems as though the average reader and commentator were in main comfortable with understanding the message that the verse tries to convey. This turned parts of the verse into colloquial elements. However, considerable difficulties arose when one tried to anchor the general understanding in the MT. In that case, the unusual syntax, grammatical forms, hapax legomena, and incomplete metaphors combine to make an exegete’s task formidable.

C PROPOSED SOLUTION

Psalm 90 is one of the better known of the psalter, V, because of its function in various religious rituals and its observations on the human condition. The thematic, structural, theological, and historical problems that it posed have attracted considerable and continued interest of the religious and scholarly community. Unfortunately, this interest did not extend to the textual difficulties in MT. Thus, while v. 10 is widely known and frequently used colloquially, hardly any new exegetical ideas were advanced with regard to its textual difficulties and consequent interpretation. In this section a new understanding of v. 10 will be presented that exploits some well-established text-critical tools.

It is obvious to anyone with a modicum of Hebrew knowledge that v. 10αα is awkward. Verse 10αβ ewhardly adds anything n. From the thematic point of view, having both ages (70 and 80) does not make any substantial difference; man’s life is finite and short in any case. If MT v. 10αα+10αβ is the Psalmist’s original formulation one may rightly wonder why he did not more cogently omit הם and write ימי שנותינו עשרים שנה: It seems as though the Psalmist was constrained by the accepted formulation of a popular text (or proverb) that he borrowed and used. This suggests authorial indecision (or, conservatism) and a compromise solution that produced a conflated text. Thus, it is

91 Hayot, תהילים, 200. Hayot believes that the original was ימי שנותינו עשרים שנה and comes from a later variant version for רהב, which was noted on the margin and later included in the text.
likely that v. 10α+10β is the end-result of conflating two colloquial sayings: שנותינו שבעים שנה ("the days of our vigor [are] seventy years"), and בנויה שמות שנה ("Our years with might [are] eighty years"). Perhaps, Targum’s מתאלמין for בהם reflects כֻּחֵנוּ.

One readily notes that v. 10, in essence, repeats the main idea expressed in vv. 8-9. Thus, it is reasonable to consider v. 10 as mentioning a proverb that supports the idea presented in vv. 8-9. The author had, however, to decide which of two popular proverbs to use. He opted to conflate the two proverbs; placing the two proverbs practically side by side:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{separate} & \quad \text{שנותינו שבעים שנה} & \quad \text{בנויה שמות שנה} \\
\text{conflated} & \quad \text{שנותינו בנויה שמות שנה} & \quad \text{כֻּחֵנוּ שבעים שנה}
\end{align*}
\]

where the conditional אם serves as a conjunctive.

Conflation of equally valid, or similarly venerated, texts was apparently a standard practice among scribes in ancient Israel. Zimmermann argued that,

\[\ldots\,\text{as one may reasonably surmise, the scribes who guarded the text so reverently, letter by letter, would have been loath to discard variant readings which may have been striking alternatives.}\]

The present writer takes the view that, for a brief short-lived period in the transmission of the Hebrew text, a school of proto-Masoretes attempted to imbed in the text variant readings. For the most part, it was probably assumed that the reader would tacitly recognize that a particular verse had variant readings. Of course, these proto-Masoretes could not conceive or did not indulge in the footnotes or apparatus of which a modern editor avails to his self. By and large, however, their method of marking variants consisted of assigning them the following position in the text:

(i) at the end of a verse
(ii) at, or as close as possible, to the cesura (the later official Atnahta)
(iii) side by side in the text.\(^2\)

The conflated text שנותינו בנויה שמות שנה אם בנויה שמות שנה is certainly awkward. This might have been intentional; as Zimmerman notes "it was probably assumed that the reader would tacitly recognize that a particular verse had variant readings." However, it is possible that a later copyist, coming across the word כֻּחֵנוּ in a densely written indistinct Hebrew manuscript, mis-

conceived it as the pronominal הבש; the awkwardness of the conflated text contributing subconsciously to the misconception.

The confusion of the two words הבש and הבנה can be easily rationalized. Confusion of הבש and הבנה is well attested in the Tanach. In the Hebrew orthography of about 400 B.C.E. the left leg of current הבש was not separated from the top. The ancient הבש looked like the current הבש with a top somewhat extended to the left. Confusion of הבש and הבנה was quite likely and occurs in the Tanach. Finally, the ligature הבש = הבנה has been recognized by biblical scholarship and is attested in the Tanach. From a text-critical point of view confusion of הבש with הבנה is certainly possible. Moreover, a הבנה category occurs in Pirkei Abot 5:21 division of ages, albeit it is associated with the age of thirty, which is not referred to in v. 10. The age of seventy is categorized by רוח ("graying"), which would also indicate a phase of vigor.

The pair הבש and הבנה occurs in 1 Chr 29:12 and 2 Chr 20:6, and they are

93 The Ketib-Qere apparatus contains the following cases: Jos 4:18, Jud 19:25 הבש but הבנה (K) but הבש (Q); Jos 6:5 הבש but הבנה (K) but הבש (Q); 1 Sam 11:6 הבש but הבש (Q); 1 Sam 11:9 הבש but הבש (Q); 2 Sam 5:24 הבש but הבש (Q); 2 Sam 12:31 הבש but הבש (Q); and, Est 3:4 הבש but הבש (Q). Hos 14:3 has instead of הבש. The Koren Tanach (Jerusalem: Koren, 1983), 11-14 at the end notes that some MSS have in 1 Sam 30:30 הבש but הבש in others; in 1 Sam 7:22 הבש but הבש in others; in Ezek 30:9 הבש but הבש in others; in Ezek 31:11 הבש but הבש in others; in Job 21:12 הבש but הבש in others; in 2 Chr 20:37 הבש but הבש in others; Codex Petersburg and Codex Allepo have הבש but הבש. Cross, “The Development of the Jewish Scripts,” in The Bible and the Ancient Near East, Essays in Honor of W. F. Albright (ed. G. Ernest Wright; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1961), 137, Fig. 1.

94 Frank M. Cross, “The Development of the Jewish Scripts,” in The Bible and the Ancient Near East, Essays in Honor of W. F. Albright (ed. G. Ernest Wright; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1961), 137, Fig. 1.

95 The Ketib-Qere apparatus attests to the following cases of הבש/b הבנה confusion: 2 Sam 13:37 has הבש but הבנה (Q); Prov 20:21 has הבש but הבנה (Q); Cant 1:17 has הבש but הבנה (Q); and Dan 9:29 has הבש but הבנה (Q). Also, 2 Sam 23:25 has הבש but 1 Chr 11:27 has הבש; Gen 2:14 MT has הבש but the Samaritan Bible has הבש; Gen 25:9 MT has הבש but the Samaritan Bible has הבש; etc. Torczyner (Tur-Sinai) mentions the following: in 1 Prov 1:21 הבש instead of הבש; Tov, Textual Criticism of the Bible: An Introduction (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1989), 167. See also James Kennedy and Nahum Levison, An Aid to the Textual Amendment of the Old Testament (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1928), 17.

96 Raphael Weiss, “On Ligatures in the Hebrew Bible (ב = ב),” JBL 82 (1963): 188-194. The ligature הבש = הבש is attested in the Josh 5:1 but הבש (K) but הבש (Q); Ps 12:8 has הבש instead of הבש; Job 22:20 has הבש for הבש perhaps, Jos 2:4 הבש for הבש; etc. This ligature occurs also in the Qumran scroll 11QPS [Plate 8, Col. X, Lines 1, 6]. Cf. Emanuel Tov, The Textual Criticism of the Bible: An Introduction (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1989), 167. The closely related ligature הבש instead of הבש is attested in Job 34:36 and 2 Kgs 5:13.
parallel in Mic 3:8. Thus there is support in the Tanach for the suggested parallelism between כחון and גבורת. This parallelism could provide also some insights into the meaning of גבורת. In the Tanach, the plural feminine noun גְּבוּרוֹת is used to describe the mighty deeds of God (Deut 3:24, Pss 20:7, 71:16, 106:2,145:4, 12,150:2, and Isa 63:15). Prolonging man’s life to eighty years would not seem to be in this category. Moreover, the only defectiva גבורת in our verse suggests that it might have resulted from a ה/ת confusion in the Hebrew square-script. This confusion is attested in the Ketib-Qere apparatus. It is also possible that בגבורה was written originally in the abbreviated form בגבור. G. R. Driver notes that “A very common abbreviation is the omission of the feminine singular.” Perhaps, at a later time, when the abbreviations were filled in, was completed by adding erroneously a ת at the end (under the influence of the many גְּבוּרוֹת), rather than a ה. Whatever the specific mechanism for the error might have been, it is obvious that it could have occurred naturally.

Understanding MT v. 10α+10β as stemming from a conflation and being originally שנותינו כֻּחֵנוּ שבעים שנה ואם בגבורה שמונים שנה ימי, though somewhat awkward Hebrew, has considerable advantages: (1) it explains the origination of the construct ימי; (2) it removes the impossible pronominal rhyme בָּהֶם; (3) it replaces בָּהֶם with כֻּחֵנוּ, which fits the context; and, (4) כֻּחֵנוּ is an excellent equivalent of גְּבוּרוֹת. Thus, MT v. 10α is a somewhat corrupted version of an original, which intended to say:

Whether

The days of our vigor are seventy years

or

97 See 2 Kgs 24:14 תושרְת שֵׁעַרְת (K) but שעירת (Q); Jer 25:1; 32:1 עשת (K) but שֵׁעַרְת (Q); Jer 49:25 תְלֹלָה לְתָלָה (K) but תְלָלָה תְלָלָה (Q); and, Jer 52:21 קומֶה (K) but קומֶה (Q). Perhaps one should read in Prov 12:28 מָשְׁבַּט נֶרֶךְ כָּה instead of מָשְׁבַּט נֶרֶךְ כָּה. The closely related ה/ת confusion occurs in Qoh 12:6 וידֶק (K) but וידֶק (Q), and one should, perhaps, read in Prov 6:34 בְּקָמָה בְקָמָה instead of בְּקָמָה. Cf. Torczyner (Tur-Sinai), מְשִׁלְשֶׁל שְׁלֵמָה, 106-107.

98 Godfrey R. Driver, “Once Again Abbreviations,” Text 2 (1962): 78. For instance, one finds in Isa 6:13 וַיִּכְּבֻּנֶה instead of וַיִּכְּבֻּנֶה (1 QIs), 2 Chr 20:25 תִּכְלְשַׁל instead of תִּכְלְשַׁל (LXX: κτήνη), Prov 30:14 וַנָּתַן instead of וַנָּתַן (parallel to וַנָּתַן), 2 Sam 13:20 MT תִּטְשֵׁב הָרָה נָהָר instead of תִּטְשֵׁב הָרָה נָהָר, etc.. Driver, “Once Again,” 93-94, notes that “the recognition of hidden abbreviations in the MT can thus be used for the recovery of the original text without emendation. The method, however, must be used with circumspection and due regard for the rules. These are, briefly, that only certain categories of terms are subject to abbreviation, namely: terminations, including pronominal elements; independent pronouns; . . .”
Our years with might [are] eighty years

שנותינו בגבורה שמונים שנה

they can be described by

רהב, עמל ואון.

Though רהב occurs in many cognate Semitic languages its etymology is not clear. The word might be related to the ferocious and proud Assyrian mythical sea monsters. Schunck says,


In the Tanach, the verb רהב is used in the sense “act stormily, boisterously, arrogantly.”100 It seems prudent to derive the meaning of the hapax legomenon רֹהַב (noun) from the sense that the well-attested verb רָהַב has. In our verse, the noun רֹהַב could mean “pride” and be a metonymic reference to that which one is proud of.

The pair עמל ואון, or און ואמל occurs frequently in the Tanach (Isa 10:1; 59:4; Pss 10:7; 55:11; 7:15; Job 4:8; 15:35; Hab 1:3). DCH translates און as “misfortune” when it is paired with עמל in Hab 1:3, Num 23:21, Job 5:6, Ps 55:11, 90:10, but not elsewhere.101 The Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament explains the pairing of עמל ואון as one being the logical consequence of the other; עמל “trouble” is the result of און “inequity.”102 Ibn Ezra (on Hab 1:3) says that און ואמל is a general term encompassing all the depravity and sin that man is capable of.

The masculine noun עמל (once as feminine in Qoh 10:15) means “trouble, labor, toil.” From this meaning are derived “weariness,” “trouble” and “vexation.” Gesenius notes that some render עמל as “sin, wickedness (i.e., און)” (Num 23:21; Isa 10:1), but he believes that the meaning of “vexation” is also possible in both places.103 In our case too, the context of the verse admits “vexation” as the meaning of עמל. Andersen understands און as conveying the agony of body or mind that is humanity’s inevitable lot (Job 5:7) and

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100 Cf. BDB, 923a.
101 DCH, 154.
102 TDOT 1:142.
particularly the weariness of a person worn out by work and cares of this life. It is spiritual torture, weariness, exhaustion, enervation, or a loss of vitality that is caused not by any physical tiredness but by the hostile behavior of one’s fellows.\textsuperscript{104}

The masculine noun נה, in absolute state, means “trouble, sorrow, wickedness.” Johnson understands it as “meaningless misfortune."\textsuperscript{105} Some have suggested that נה means “trouble” when it is coupled with עמל.\textsuperscript{106} Szeles feels that נה expresses human wickedness in the form of deceit, misrepresentation, deliberate misleading of someone so as to do harm or cause him suffer (Isa 10:1, 59:4, Num 23:21, Job 5:6).\textsuperscript{107} Of the various meanings that נה could have it is probably used here in the sense of “sorrow.” Choosing נה to describe the nature of human life, the psalmist may have intended also to imply its homophone אבן “stone,” the indifference that humans so often exhibit.

Weiser observes that “the familiar verse which pronounces a completely pessimistic verdict on the brevity and transience of life . . . does not leave any room for even a mere attempt to take a more positive attitude to life.”\textsuperscript{108} However, the quick passage of one’s life cannot be the cause for its being נה. Thus, כיɬ in v. 105 is not the beginning of a cause as it is in vv. 8 and 9; it cannot mean “for, because.” Moreover, the context does not admit the other fundamental meanings of כי “that, when.” What is the function of כי in v. 105? The formગ, qal 3rd person singular perfect of גז “pass over, pass away,” occurs only in our verse. Other forms of the root can be found in Num 11:31, Ps 71:6, and perhaps in Nah 1:12. The root is kindred to גזז “cut, terminate,” sharing with the roots of the bi-radical stem גזה, גזז, גזל, גזם, גזע, גזר its fundamental sense. In our verse the singular is odd, since all the other words are plurals.

The difficulties with כיɬ and singular ג can be resolved if it is recognized that כיɬ is corrupted. It is easy to see how the unseparated phrase כיɬ could have been perceived being the word נגוז, perhaps reflected in Vulgate’s transivimus. While the י/ס confusion is not attested in the Ketib-Qere apparatus it is very likely because of the orthographic similarity between the two letters in both the Hebrew paleo-script and square script. Such confusion might be the cause for the difference in Isa 49:4 between א in 1QIs\textsuperscript{b} and א in Codex Leningrad. We find also in 2 Sam 23:27 עמש but in 1 Chr 11:29 עמש, which is the same as in 2 Sam 21:18. Perhaps, in Lam 3:52 one should read חנמ instead of חנמ; in Prov 27:24

\textsuperscript{104} Francis I. Andersen, Habakkuk (AB 25; New York: Doubleday, 2001), 113, 115.
\textsuperscript{108} Weiser, Psalms, 599.
The adverb חיש is a *hapax legomenon*, which was apparently derived from the well-attested verb חוש I (Ps 71:12), which means “haste, make haste.” This meaning gives the phrase חיש נגז the sense “we fade quickly.” However, the psalmist could have obtained this sense by using the well-known adverb מַהְרָה. Why did he opt for the *hapax legomenon* חיש? Perhaps, this choice is not accidental. It could be that the psalmist intended the reader to associate intuitively with חוש II “feel, enjoy.” As the Ketib-Qere (חושה-חוש) in Ps 71:12 indicates, the two words were probably pronounced the same way, and consequently confused. The psalmist could have expected his sophisticated readers appreciate his clever choice of the word חיש, to indicate both the quick passing of life and the deterioration of senses.

The last word, ‘ֻפָה uni (הּ alt וַנָּ)” and we shall fly,” cannot be correct. The ancient could not have imagined man flying. In the Tanach only locust (Nah 3:16), birds (Deut 4:17, Isa 31:5, Hab 1:8, Hos 9:1, Prov 23:5, 26:2, Ps 55:7) and angels (Isa 6:2, 6, Dan 9:21) are mentioned as having the capability to fly. In Ps 55:7 the psalmist asks rhetorically: “Can someone give me wing as a dove, so that I would fly and settle down?” The answer to this question is an obvious “No.” The psalmist has to remain in his place; man cannot fly. Upon his death man returns to earth, and goes down to Sheol. Man could see objects fly, and could fantasize about angels flying, but could not imagine himself fly. No metaphor of this kind could have been admitted. Thus, it is impossible to accept that MT ‘ֻפָה uni is the original reading.

Fortunately, a transposition of two adjacent letters in ונפעה results in the word ונפעה “and we shall groan.” Text-criticism is well aware of the many metathesis cases in the Tanach, and considers this a minor emendation. would be the *qal* 1st person plural imperfect of *פעה* “groan (onomatopoeic).” In the Tanach, the root *פעה* is used only once in Isa 42:14 (כַּיּוֺלֵדָה יאֶפְ) to describe a woman’s constrained groans during child delivery. However, Arabic has בֶּכֶּה, and Aramaic has מֶכֶּה, both with the sense “bleat.” The root is also

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109 Jehuda Feliks, *The Animal World of the Bible* (Tel Aviv: Sinai, 1962), 108. Feliks observes: “‘The flying serpents’ in the Book of Isaiah [14:29, 30:6] are likewise present in the literature of the people of the East. Herodotus, the historian, describes them as if they were real animals: ‘The flying serpents live in Arabia. Countless numbers are found near the frankincense trees; they migrate to Egypt where they are eaten in their thousands by Glossy Ibises.’ As yet, no flying snake has ever been found in Israel or for that matter anywhere else on the earth.”

used in the Talmud and Midrashic literature.\textsuperscript{111} It is possible that the rarity of the verb in the Tanach was a contributing factor for the scribal metathesis, which resulted in the difficult MT \textit{ונעפה}.

The word \textit{נמפעה} gives an excellent contextual fit when it is recognized that the groan that it refers to is the “death rattle.” This rattle, now known clinically as \textit{terminal respiratory secretions} or simply \textit{terminal secretions}, was frequently witnessed by the ancients and associated with death. A death rattle is produced by a person near death because fluids (saliva and bronchial secretions) accumulate in the throat and upper chest, and he has no more the ability to swallow.\textsuperscript{112} This interpretation of \textit{נמפעה} parallels beautifully the use of \textit{הגה} “moan, growl,” used in the phrase \textit{כnnכֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶn} that is, in the troughs of death we often groan, scream, or mumble loudly.

The solutions that have been suggested for the difficulties encountered in v. 10, lead to the following reading:

\textit{The days of our vigor [are] seventy years}  
\textit{Or}  
\textit{Our years with might [are] eighty years}  
\textit{And their pride [is] vexation and sorrow.}  
\textit{We fade quickly, and we rattle}

This reading can be paraphrased:

The years in which we have strength are about seventy (or, when particularly mighty they are eighty). That which one is proud of, is in retrospect only vexation and sorrow. We quickly fade, lose our senses, and make the death rattle . . .

D CONCLUSION

Verse 90:10 seems to consist of popular sayings about the brevity and insignificance of human life. The psalmist combined these sayings and wove them into a powerful premise for his fundamental plea in v. 13: “Return, O God! // Till when? // And have mercy upon Your servants (\textit{שובה יהוה עד־מתי והנחם על־עבדיך}).”

\textsuperscript{111} Jastrow, 1202a.
The critical element in the plea is the temporal phrase “Till when?” (עד מתי). It connects with the temporal elements in almost each of the preceding verses. In v. 10, the gloomy perspective on life, its shortness and misery, is the basis for the psalmist’s plea that God returns to show grace to his servants. Repeating the life-spans of seventy and eighty, the psalmist articulates a life-consciousness determined by sadness, by melancholy, the experience of God’s distance—the same complaint of the great, universal lamentation of Ecclesiastes, lifted to heights of abstraction, an ahistorical adjuration of what cannot be changed.113

Man has to die, but he cannot fly. Upon death, “dust returns to the earth as it was, and the breath returns to God who gave it” (Qoh 12:7)—nothing flies. Commentators seem to have missed this point. The suggested reading (and we rattle . . .) for MT וַנִּפְּלֶה provides an eminently suitable word for the text. We are born accompanied by our mothers’ groan (Isa 42:14, and we die with a death rattle (Ps 90:10, וַנִּפְּלֶה). The symmetry is striking.

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