

YHVH the One who rides the clouds

Throughout the Hebrew Scripture our G-d is depicted as One whose abode is the heavens above. Thus often G-d has to come down to see what man is doing. We also find that the natural elements that have their place in the sky/heavens become the way in which G-d speaks to His children. The natural elements of thunder, lightening, rain, and clouds are used in Hebrew Scripture as expressions of G-d's power and transcendence. The first place this imagery of our G-d with the language of the storm might surprise some since the verse in which it occurs has traditionally been mistranslated. Using the work of Jeffrey Niehaus I will condense his work into a more manageable format. The verse I am referring to is Genesis 3:8 where G-d comes and walks with Adam "in the cool of the day". The phrase in question comes from the Hebrew words HaYom-L'Ruach. While the word "ruach" can mean wind and the word "yom" mean day cognate language study has produced another option. In both Akkadian and Hebrew the word "yom" can mean "storm". (William Holladay, A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament, 1971, p. 131). On this understanding, the translation of Genesis 3:8 changes significantly. It now reads: "Then the man and his wife heard the thunderstorm voice of G-d as He was going back and forth in the garden in the 'wind of the storm' and they hid from YHVH G-d among the trees of the garden". YHVH has come to judge His disobedient servants. So He comes in the first storm theophany, a manner of coming later associated in the Hebrew Scripture with the "Day of YHVH". With this understanding other words in the verse such as "kol" (voice) and "walking" should be retranslated as "thunderous voice" (Ex 19:16) and moving to and fro (as lightning, Ps 77:17-19).

Psalm 18:8, 10-12

Then the earth rocked and quaked; the foundations of the mountain shook...He bent the sky and came down, thick cloud beneath His feet. He mounted a cherub and flew, gliding on the wings of the wind, He made darkness His screen, dark thunderheads, dense clouds of sky were His pavilion around Him.

Psalm 104:3-4

He sets the rafters of His lofts in the waters, makes the cloud His chariot, moves on the wings of the wind. He makes the winds His messengers, fiery flames His servants.

Psalm 77: 15-21

You are the G-d who works wonders; You have manifested Your strength among the peoples. By Your arm You redeemed Your people, the children of Jacob and Joseph. The waters saw You, O G-d, the waters saw You and were convulsed; the very deep quaked as well. Clouds streamed water; the heavens rumbled; Your arrows flew about; Your thunder rumbled like wheels; lightning lit up the world; the earth quaked and trembled. Your way was through the sea; Your path, through the mighty waters; Your tracks could not be seen; You led your people like flock in the care of Moses and Aaron.