

# Job 41: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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Date: 13 May 2021

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[0:00] Job chapter 41. Can you draw out Leviathan with a fish hook, or press down his tongue with a cord? Can you put a rope in his nose, or pierce his jaw with a hook? Will he make many pleas to you?

Will he speak to you soft words? Will he make a covenant with you, to take him for your servant forever? Will you play with him as with a bird, or will you put him on a leash for your girls? Will traders bargain over him? Will they divide him up among the merchants? Can you fill his skin with harpoons, or his head with fishing spears? Lay your hands on him. Remember the battle, you will not do it again. Behold, the hope of a man is false. He is laid low even at the sight of him. No one is so fierce that he dares to stir him up. Who then is he who can stand before me? Who has first given to me that I should repay him? Whatever is under the whole heaven is mine. I will not keep silence concerning his limbs, or his mighty strength, or his goodly frame. Who can strip off his outer garment? Who would come near him with a bridle? Who can open the doors of his face? Around his teeth is terror. His back is made of rows of shields, shut up closely as with a seal. One is so near to another that no air can come between them.

[1:15] They are joined one to another. They clasp each other, and cannot be separated. His sneezings flash forth light, and his eyes are like the eyelids of the dawn. Out of his mouth go flaming torches, sparks of fire leap forth. Out of his nostrils comes forth smoke, as from a boiling pot and burning rushes. His breath kindles coals, and a flame comes forth from his mouth. In his neck abides strength, and terror dances before him. The folds of his flesh stick together, firmly cast on him, and immovable. His heart is hard as a stone, hard as the lower millstone. When he raises himself up, the mighty are afraid. At the crashing, they are besides themselves. Though the sword reaches him, it does not avail. Nor the spear, the dart, or the javelin. He counts iron as straw, and bronze as rotten wood. The arrow cannot make him flee. For him slingstones are turned to stubble.

Clubs are counted as stubble. He laughs at the rattle of javelins. His underparts are like sharp potsherds. He spreads himself like a threshing sledge on the mire. He makes the deep boil like a pot.

He makes the sea like a pot of ointment. Behind him he leaves a shining wake. One would think the deep to be white-haired. On earth there is not his like, a creature without fear. He sees everything that is high. He is king over all the sons of pride. As in the interpretation of the figure of the Behemoth in chapter 40 of Job, the interpreter of Job chapter 41 is faced with the question of what sort of creature is in view. Is it real, but poetically exaggerated? Many have regarded Leviathan as a crocodile. Is it a legendary or cryptozoological creature, believed by Job and his contemporaries to be real? Is it a poetic description of a species of dinosaur? Perhaps it's a representation of an extinct species through the lens of legends of great monsters and dragons, developed surrounding discoveries of dinosaur fossils. Is it a supernatural creature, a symbolic or metaphysical creature? Is it a complex personification or some creature of ancient Near Eastern mythology? In treating Job chapter 40, I argued, largely following Robert File, that Behemoth was a personified representation of the real power and existence of death in nature. The personification of death as Behemoth or Mart within ancient Near Eastern society would be a lot thicker than our personifications of death, as the figure of the Grim Reaper, for instance. The depiction of Behemoth drew upon elements of actual and legendary creatures and pagan mythology, as all of these things partially manifest the greater reality of the power of death in creation. The figure of the Leviathan, which is the centre of chapter 41, first appeared in Job's curse lament of chapter 3, where he invoked the powers of chaos and decreation to extinguish his life before it first came to birth. In verse 8 of that chapter, Let those curse it who curse the day, who are ready to rouse up Leviathan. In the context of chapter 3, the Leviathan was manifestly more than just another of the great sea or water creatures, like the

crocodile or even the whale. It was a chaos monster of the deep. In Ugaritic literature of the Baal cycle, Lotan is a seven-headed serpentine dragon of the deep, defeated by Baal-Hadad. In Job, Leviathan personifies the forces of chaos and evil. If Behemoth is the personified power of death, his fitting counterpart is the personified force of chaos and evil in Leviathan. In considering the nature of Leviathan, we might relate it to the question of the character of the serpent in Genesis chapter 3 and the great dragon of Revelation chapter 12. Is the serpent of Genesis chapter 3 merely a natural species of snake, or perhaps the ancestor of all later species? Almost certainly not, although its connection with actual snakes is essential to its characterisation. In Genesis chapter 3, the serpent seems to be a physical and visual manifestation of a supernatural heavenly being, of Satan himself.

[ 5 : 25 ] Elsewhere, the serpent figure is manifested in actual snakes, in symbolic serpents, in the representation of tyrannical human powers, for instance. It's also a metaphysical portrayal of the great satanic power behind and in them all, a figure that is even represented in the stars of the zodiac. In Revelation chapter 12 verse 9, the dragon is described as follows, and the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world. In that chapter, the dragon is represented as engaging in actions in his dragon form. Are we supposed to believe that somewhere an actual material and physical dragon did the things described in that chapter? No. But is the dragon real? Yes, absolutely. The figure of the dragon corresponds to an immense and mighty hostile devilish power at work in reality. The figure of the dragon helps us to recognise the existence of a single malicious purpose and agency behind all sorts of events. It characterises that power as cunning, monstrous, devouring and destructive. It is a power that cannot be mastered or controlled by mankind. It is immense and mighty. It represents something of the cruelty of nature itself, while also being strange and uncanny. Representation of such forces is one of the purposes of mythology. It helps us to see things that are real, even if they aren't material. The presence of the great dragon at the end of Job should not surprise us in the least, for we encountered him in the form of Satan at the beginning of the book. If we were not supposed to see a manifestation of the figure of Satan in Leviathan, the book would leave key elements of its plot somewhat unresolved. The

Lord's interactions with Satan were prominent in the prologue of Job in chapters 1 and 2, but Satan doesn't appear anywhere in the epilogue. However, if we recognise that Satan is to be seen in Leviathan, the dragon of the abyss, of whom the Lord speaks in his concluding address to Job, we begin to see where some of the remaining pieces of the puzzle fit. Through his discussion of the figure of Leviathan, the Lord is also giving Job some hint or indication of what lay behind his suffering. In Behemoth and Leviathan, the forces that have terrified Job are being named. The figure of Rahab, related to the figure of Leviathan, also appeared earlier on in Job in chapter 26. File remarks upon the great similarities between chapter 26 and the Lord's challenges to Job in chapters 38 to 41. As in these current chapters, chapter 26 depicts the creation in mythological terms. Verses 5 to 13 of that chapter read as follows.

The dead tremble under the waters and their inhabitants. Sheol is naked before God, and Abaddon has no covering. He stretches out the north over the void, and hangs the earth on nothing. He binds up the waters in his thick clouds, and the cloud is not split open under them. He covers the face of the full moon, and spreads over it his cloud. He has inscribed a circle on the face of the waters, at the boundary between light and darkness. The pillars of heaven tremble, and are astounded at his rebuke. By his power he stilled the sea. By his understanding he shattered Rahab. By his wind the heavens were made fair. His hand pierced the fleeing serpent. In chapter 26, Sheol and Abaddon personify the realm of death and the underworld. Rahab and the sea personify the terror of the deep, of chaos and of evil. Rahab is like Leviathan, as the great dread monster of the sea, a supernatural agency that the Lord overcomes. Elsewhere in scripture, Rahab is connected with tyrannical powers, like those of Egypt, helping the reader to recognize demonic power operating through and in them.

Psalms 89 verses 9 to 10. You rule the raging of the sea. When its waves rise, you still them. You crushed Rahab like a carcass. You scattered your enemies with your mighty arm. More powerful still, Isaiah chapter 51 verses 9 to 10. Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord. Awake, as in days of old, the generations of long ago. Was it not you who cut Rahab in pieces, who pierced the dragon? Was it not you who dried up the sea, the waters of the great deep, who made the depths of the sea a way for the redeemed to pass over? Here imagery of the Lord's victory over the

chaos monster, drawn from ancient Near Eastern mythology, is used to depict the Lord's victory over Pharaoh and his might in the deliverance of Israel from Egypt. The figure of Leviathan appears on several similar occasions in scripture, helping us to appreciate the mythological force of this dragon. In Psalm 74 verses 12 to 14.

[10:05] Yet God my King is from of old, working salvation in the midst of the earth. You divided the sea by your might. You broke the heads of the sea monsters on the waters. You crushed the heads of Leviathan.

You gave him as food for the creatures of the wilderness. Psalm 104, the Great Creation Psalm, describes Leviathan in verses 24 to 26. O Lord, how manifold are your works! In wisdom have you made them all. The earth is full of your creatures. Here is the sea great and wide, which teems with creatures innumerable, living things both small and great. There go the ships and Leviathan, which you form to play in it. And then again one of the strongest references in Isaiah chapter 27 verse 1. In that day the Lord with his hard and great and strong sword will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent, Leviathan the twisting serpent, and he will slay the dragon that is in the sea. Leviathan then should not be understood as just another creature of zoology. He has never existed as that sort of entity.

Nevertheless, he is a real mythological creature. He is the dragon of revelation. He is the serpent of Genesis 3. He is the shadowy agency behind tyrants throughout the story of the scripture. In this great poem the Lord describes Leviathan as an untamable monster who cannot be mastered by human beings.

He cannot be bound, controlled or subdued. The forms of hunting that might work for a whale or a crocodile do not work on him. He isn't just another creature in the sea. He dwells deep in the bowels of the metaphysical deep, the terrifying abyss that threatens to swallow things up. Yet despite describing Leviathan as a force that no human being can subdue, the Lord implies throughout that he can control and subdue the Leviathan. File translates verses 9 to 12 in a way that brings the conflict between Satan and the Lord to the forefront, enabling us through its arresting language to see the futility of Satan's challenge to the Lord. Look now, there is no hope of your subduing him. Even the mere sight of him is overwhelming. No one is fierce enough to arouse him, and who is there who can stand and face me?

[12:15] If anyone tries to outface me, I will pay him back. Everything under the heavens is mine. I will silence his boasting and his mighty words and his fine argument. In the description of Leviathan in the verses that follow, the reader might hear resemblances between the description of his coming and the language of divine theophany against those who would think of Leviathan as a crocodile or a dinosaur.

He is described as a fire-breathing dragon. In verses 18 to 21, it is the fiery breath of Leviathan that is his most notable feature. Like Leviathan, Satan is a one whose destructive power is chiefly located in his mouth, in his false and vicious speech. He is the father of lies. He sows discord. He is the accuser, the slanderer, and the destroyer. No weapon human beings have forged is of any use against him. As Paul writes in Ephesians chapter 6 verse 12, for we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. The figure of the dragon has the power of death, and therefore holds people hostage through fear. Hebrews chapter 2 verses 14 to 15. Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. The devil has the power of death and fear, but he himself is fearless. He throws the deep into a tumult. Here we should think not just of the physical deep, but of the symbolic deep. He brings up terrors from the abyss against us. He stirs up the seeds of the nations against the people of God, in keeping with the language of a sort of demonic theophany.

Even the angels quake before him in verse 25. There is no way to master, overcome, or defeat Leviathan, this dread monster of the primordial deep. No weapon or power that human beings could devise would ever make us his match. And the Lord wants Job to recognize his powerlessness against this great monster. Only God can overcome the Leviathan, and he will do just that. The Lord subdues all of Leviathan's evil might. Satan and his power are terrifying, but the Lord is utterly invulnerable to all of his evil raging. As Phaul observes, Luther's great hymn, A Mighty Fortress is Our God, echoes this chapter's depiction of Leviathan in his description of Satan.

The ancient prince of hell has risen with purpose fell, strong male of craft and power, he weareth in this hour. On earth is not his fellow. It is only with a more complex understanding of the great and terrible powers that operate within the fallen cosmos that Job will begin to be equipped to understand what has been happening in his experience. In the final description of the figure of Leviathan in this chapter, the terrible dragon of the abyssal deep is finally brought into the light and out of his shadow and darkness. As we finally reckon with his malignant agency, much else that has formerly been in the shadow is illumined.

[ 15 : 23 ] A question to consider, what might we learn from this chapter about the Lord's relationship with Leviathan? What are the important lessons that Job might have learned from that?