

Lesson 3

Does the Bible contain myths and legends intermixed with verifiable history?

There are several parts of the Bible that perpetuate this kind of thinking, including the fantastic miracles the Bible records.

- Are we to interpret those miracles as
 - factual,
 - historical events, or simply as
 - legends and myths?
- Examples

Job 41

- ^{1a} Can you pull in Leviathan with a fishhook
or tie down its tongue with a rope?
- ² Can you put a cord through its nose
or pierce its jaw with a hook?
- ³ Will it keep begging you for mercy?
Will it speak to you with gentle words?
- ⁴ Will it make an agreement with you
for you to take it as your slave for life?
- ⁵ Can you make a pet of it like a bird
or put it on a leash for the young women in your house?
- ⁶ Will traders barter for it?
Will they divide it up among the merchants?
- ⁷ Can you fill its hide with harpoons
or its head with fishing spears?
- ⁸ If you lay a hand on it,
you will remember the struggle and never do it again!
- ⁹ Any hope of subduing it is false;
the mere sight of it is overpowering.
- ¹⁰ No one is fierce enough to rouse it.
Who then is able to stand against me?

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¹¹ Who has a claim against me that I must pay?
Everything under heaven belongs to me.

¹² "I will not fail to speak of Leviathan's limbs,
its strength and its graceful form.

¹³ Who can strip off its outer coat?
Who can penetrate its double coat of armor^{13a}?

¹⁴ Who dares open the doors of its mouth,
ringed about with fearsome teeth?

¹⁵ Its back has^{15a} rows of shields
tightly sealed together;

¹⁶ each is so close to the next
that no air can pass between.

¹⁷ They are joined fast to one another;
they cling together and cannot be parted.

¹⁸ Its snorting throws out flashes of light;
its eyes are like the rays of dawn.

¹⁹ Flames stream from its mouth;
sparks of fire shoot out.

²⁰ Smoke pours from its nostrils
as from a boiling pot over burning reeds.

²¹ Its breath sets coals ablaze,
and flames dart from its mouth.

²² Strength resides in its neck;
dismay goes before it.

²³ The folds of its flesh are tightly joined;
they are firm and immovable.

²⁴ Its chest is hard as rock,
hard as a lower millstone.

²⁵ When it rises up, the mighty are terrified;
they retreat before its thrashing.

²⁶ The sword that reaches it has no effect,
nor does the spear or the dart or the javelin.

²⁷ Iron it treats like straw
and bronze like rotten wood.

²⁸ Arrows do not make it flee;
slingstones are like chaff to it.

²⁹ A club seems to it but a piece of straw;
it laughs at the rattling of the lance.

³⁰ Its undersides are jagged potsherds,

leaving a trail in the mud like a threshing sledge.

³¹ It makes the depths churn like a boiling caldron
and stirs up the sea like a pot of ointment.

³² It leaves a glistening wake behind it;
one would think the deep had white hair.

³³ Nothing on earth is its equal—
a creature without fear.

³⁴ It looks down on all that are haughty;
it is king over all that are proud.”

- **Poetic description** : We must also keep in mind that the description of Leviathan in Job 41 is a *poetic* description rather than one you would find in a biology textbook.
- **Not literal descriptions**: In other words, the “flaming torches” and “sparks of fire” that reportedly come out of Leviathan’s mouth are not literal descriptions.
- **Bombardier beetle**: Similarly, we could poetically say that “flaming torches” and “sparks of fire” proceed from the rear end of the bombardier beetle, even though the chemical reaction produced doesn’t really resemble that at all.
- **Bottom line**: The bottom line was that, when ‘God’ poetically describes what comes out of Leviathan’s mouth, “flaming torches” and “sparks of fire” was an apt description, just as it would be for the bombardier beetle.
- **Entirely reasonable and believable**: Far from being mythological or legendary, the description of Leviathan in Job 41 is entirely reasonable and believable **based upon the existing biological record**.

- We should not read these chapters of the Bible and be dismayed that they describe some legendary creature born out of the collective imaginations of ancient civilizations.
- Rather, we have all the reason we need to believe in Leviathan's existence.
- **The point of the description:** But the point of the description of Leviathan in Job 41 is
 - ❖ **not to get us to debate the believability of whether such an animal existed.** Rather,
 - ❖ it is to show us that, although humans are puny and fragile in comparison to Leviathan, God regards him as a pet, a play thing.
- **The key to understanding** what God says about Leviathan is in Job 41.10:

"No one is so fierce that he dares to stir him up. Who then is he who can stand before me?"

- ❖ If we are nothing in comparison to the strength and might of Leviathan, how small are we in comparison to Leviathan's Creator?
- ❖ If we can't tame Leviathan, how could we expect to tame Leviathan's Creator?

Do you agree with the following statement?

We can and should believe that a creature such as Leviathan existed. And we should believe all the more in the sovereignty and power of the One who created him. He is neither myth nor legend.

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- **Job 3:8**

- A mythological element also can be seen in the **poetic language** of Job 3:8:

"Let them curse it that curse the day, who are ready to rouse up leviathan."

[The KJV rendering "who are ready to raise up their mourning" misses the reference to leviathan, which is obvious in the original language.]

- In this verse, **leviathan** can be identified properly with **a mythological creature described in Ugaritic myths called Lotan**.
 - Ugaritic is an extinct Northwest Semitic language, classified by some as a dialect of the Amorite language and so the only known Amorite dialect preserved in writing. It is known through the Ugaritic texts discovered by French archaeologists in 1929 at Ugarit, including several major literary texts, notably the Baal cycle. It has been used by scholars of the Hebrew Bible to clarify Biblical Hebrew texts and has revealed ways in which the cultures of ancient Israel and Judah found parallels in the neighboring cultures.
 - ✚ According to such mythology, a marine monster named Lotan was capable of altering the entire world order by eclipsing the Sun or Moon with its body.
- Does this mean that Job was a believer in mythology, or that the book of Job is a mythological production?
 - Certainly not!

- ❖ Throughout the book that bears his name, Job is presented as a devout monotheist who rejected then-popular mythological concepts (cf. 31:26-28).
- ❖ Within the context of chapter 3, Job, who is “cursing” the day of his birth, employs the most vibrant, potent, and proverbial language available to call for the elimination of that day.
- Job was **“probably doing nothing more than utilizing for poetic purposes a common notion that his hearers would understand.**
 - ❖ This would have been **similar to modern adults referring to Santa Claus**. Mentioning his name does not mean that one believes such a person exists” (Zuck, 1978, p. 24).

Do you agree with the following statement?

Even though the Bible may make allusions to mythology, “neither the book of Job nor any of the Old Testament has the slightest hint of belief in any such mythology” (Smick, 1970, p. 229). **To suggest that the godly men and writers of the Bible believed in these mythological creatures is to make an abrasive and completely unwarranted assumption that should be avoided at all costs.** (Compare this with the previous question.)

- **Consider Isaiah 27:1:**
 - Sometimes Bible believers go the extreme and claim that the Bible never would contain such highly imaginative and creative language.
 - In Isaiah 27:1 Isaiah wrote: “In that day Jehovah with his hard and great and strong sword will punish **leviathan** the swift serpent, and **leviathan** the crooked serpent; and he will slay the monster that is in the sea.”

Commented [H3]: [Mythology and the Bible - Apologetics Press](#)

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 230 Landmark Dr.
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- Here, the inspired writer makes reference to **leviathan** in a prophetic passage depicting the future victory of God over His foes.

- From his book, we can be assured that Isaiah was a strict monotheist. But he did “draw upon the common stock of poetic imagery known to his people just as contemporary writers allude to mythology to illustrate a point without thereby expressing or encouraging faith in the story so used” (Pfeiffer, 1960, 32:209).
 - ❖ In explaining the language of Isaiah and other Bible writers who may have alluded to mythology from time to time, John Day commented:

*“Canaanite mythic imagery was the most impressive means in that ancient cultural milieu whereby to display the sovereignty and transcendence of Yahweh, along with His superiority over Baal and all other earthly contenders. Although the Hebrews **did not** borrow the theology of Canaan, they **did** borrow its imagery—here the imagery of Baal’s enemy...Leviathan”* (1998, 155:436).