

# OpenTheo

## May 13th: Job 41 & 1 John 1:1–2:6

May 12, 2021



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Leviathan! Walking in the light.

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## Transcript

Job 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 pleased 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. 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 pot-shirts.

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 Feil, that behemoth was a personified representation of the real power and existence of death

in nature.

The personification of death as behemoth or mar'at 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 cursed 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 characterization. In Genesis chapter 3, the serpent seems to be a physical and visual manifestation of a supernatural heavenly being, of Satan himself.

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 recognize the existence of a single malicious purpose and agency behind all sorts of events. It characterizes 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 recognize 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 9-10. 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 9-10.

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 12-14. 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 24-26. 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 formed to play in it.

And then again one of the strongest references, in Isaiah chapter 27 verse 1. Leviathan 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. Pfeil translates verses 9-12 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? 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 18-21, it is the fiery breath of Leviathan that is his most notable feature. Like Leviathan, Satan is 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 14-15. 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 recognise 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 Farl 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 shadow is illumined.

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? 1 John 1 1-2 6 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life, the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was made manifest to us, that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us, and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ, and we are writing these things, so that our joy may be complete. This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world. And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. Whoever says, I know him, but does not keep his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

But whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him. Whoever says he abides in him, ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.

The book of 1 John lacks certain of the features that we might usually associate with an epistle. Some scholars have suggested that it might have been an encyclical. However, it does seem to be directed to a specific situation and to its issues.

It was most likely written by John, the brother of James, and the author of the Gospel and of Revelation. This has been disputed by many, but when we look at the resemblances between the works, the traditional identification of the author would seem to be supported. When reading such a work, as we do not have intact writings of the people to

whom John is responding, we have to engage in a sort of shadow reading.

We must try to deduce the arguments of John's opponents, inferring their position from John's arguments against them. Many scholars have argued that what we have here is an argument against a sort of proto-gnosticism. The opponents of John are arguing that Christ did not come in the flesh, and denying that Jesus was the Son of God.

They also seem to be arising from within the church itself. It is very difficult to define Gnosticism, which was a very broad and variegated movement. Most represent it as a sort of dualism, dividing spirit, which is good and divine, and matter, which is created and evil.

This obviously creates problems for the claim that Jesus came in the flesh. A man named Corinthus in the second half of the first century is often seen as a key exponent, representative of the sort of position that John might have been responding to. I. Howard Marshall quotes Irenaeus, the early church father, on Corinthus.

A certain Corinthus in Asia taught that the world was not made by the first God, but by a power which was widely separated and remote from that supreme power which is above the all, and did not know the God who is over all things. Jesus, he suggested, was not born of a man, but was the son of Joseph and Mary, just like all the rest of men, but far beyond them in justice and prudence and wisdom. After his baptism Christ descended upon him in the form of a dove, from the power that is over all things, and then he proclaimed the unknown Father and accomplished miracles.

But at the end Christ separated again from Jesus, and Jesus suffered and was raised again, but Christ remained impassible, since he was pneumatic. In his commentary on the book, Peter Lighthouse pays a special attention to chapter 2 verse 22 and its description of Antichrist. Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the Antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son.

For Lighthouse, the suggestion that the opponents were denying that Jesus is the Christ, or the Messiah, is a key piece of information. It suggests that they were operating within a primarily Jewish framework, and we see in the early church a mix between Gnostic and Jewish positions at a number of points. 1 John chapter 1 does not begin as a typical epistle mite, with the sender and with greetings.

It seems more like a written sermon or address. However, it does seem to be directed at an audience that is known to the writer. It begins with the incarnation.

Christ, the word of life, was from the beginning, and they experienced him first hand with their senses. They heard him, they saw him, they looked upon him, they touched him with their hands. The word of life is both the message and the person.

By opening the epistle with a reference to the one who was from the beginning, John



might recall the beginning of his gospel. In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God. He was in the beginning with God.

All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. As eyewitnesses of this life, they testify concerning it.

The life was with the Father, and made manifest to the eyewitnesses of Christ. Christ is the ultimate source of life. In John chapter 5 verse 26, for as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself.

In chapter 14 verse 6 of the gospel of John, Jesus said to him, I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. The eyewitnesses in their turn pass on what they heard and saw and touched, proclaiming it to others in their words.

Christ is not just an individual, but the bearer of a life that is shared with his people in fellowship with the gift of the Spirit. John speaks of the communion that they enjoy with the Father and with the Son. They proclaim what they have seen and what they have heard, so that others would share fellowship with them, that they too would know participation in the life of Christ, and in that fulfill and share in the joy of the apostles themselves.

In verse 5, he moves from life and fellowship to light. The message received from Christ is that God is light and without darkness. The light-darkness contrast recalls creation.

The creation of light is the first act of the original creation. Creation moves from darkness to light. This is a common theme in the New Testament.

In 2 Corinthians chapter 4 verse 6, for God who said, Let light shine out of darkness, has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Ephesians chapter 5 verses 8 to 14, For at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light, for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true.

And try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret.

But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you. In Christ, the light of the long-awaited day of the Lord has dawned.

God dwells in inapproachable light, without any darkness at all, and as the light of Christ dawns, we are called to step into the light, to become people of the light and the day

that has come upon us. Fellowship with the God who is light requires that we walk in that light. This is not merely the site of fellowship with God, but of fellowship with each other as well.

Darkness separates us from God, and it separates us from each other. In the darkness of sin, we shrink back from the exposure of the light, we hide ourselves from others, and we hide ourselves also from God. As we walk into the light, we can give ourselves both to God and to our neighbours.

Mere verbal affirmation of Christ is not enough. To know fellowship with the one who is light and life, we must walk in the light. Our walking in the light is proof of fellowship.

The light is scary because it exposes things, most particularly our sins. However, the blood of Jesus can cleanse us from all sin. Denying that we have sin is not only self-deception, but presenting God himself to be a liar.

The blood of Christ is for those who walk in the light. Those who refuse to expose their sins to the light cannot truly be forgiven them. You can only know forgiveness for what you have confessed.

Receiving the forgiveness that God offers requires that we acknowledge our sin. And that first step into the light, confessing our sins, exposing them to the truth of God, is the most scary step of all. Walking in the light necessitates a transformed manner of relating to sin.

The darkness is a realm of hiding from the light that exposes sin. It is also sin's home turf and its breeding ground. As guilt makes us shrink back from the light, we find that sin will grow, it will spread, and it will develop.

Shrinking back from the light that exposes sins for forgiveness condemns us to walk in the realm where sin holds sway. John wishes his readers to avoid sin, that way of life that belongs to the darkness. However, as fallen people we will sin.

Fallen human beings cannot live sinless lives. When that happens, John wants us to be assured that we have both an advocate and a sacrifice for our sins. It is confidence in this that enables us to step out into the exposure of the light.

Jesus speaks on our behalf before the Father. He's an advocate for us. He also deals with our sins as an atoning sacrifice.

These are very prominent themes in the book of Hebrews, for instance. Jesus' death covers our sins like the covering of the ark from which the word is taken. Perhaps we could think of this as a sort of heat shield that enables us to approach the consuming fiery holiness of God without being burnt up.

In this capacity, Jesus covers the whole creation. He saves all of humanity from destruction. The world is still here because Jesus died, and his death covers the earth, preserving it from God's judgment.

However, while Christ's sacrifice saves all in this sense, and he is the Savior and the Lord of all, he is the Savior of those who believe in a special sense. The judgment of the wicked has been delayed by the death of Christ, but they will be destroyed. However, the righteous will finally be redeemed.

John moves on to the question of how we know that we know Christ. The answer is by keeping his commandments. Reading this, we might be tempted to think that we know that we know Christ by knowing that we keep his commandments.

We look at the works that we have done and we measure them up relative to God's law, and if they seem to be pretty good relative to God's law, we know that we're in the right with God. But experience would teach that that doesn't give much comfort much of the time. When we do compare our works to God's law, we find that they fall so far short.

Perhaps the knowledge is not an abstract knowledge, nor is the assurance found in knowing something about our works, but in the practice of our works. How do you know that you have come into a loving relationship with your spouse, for instance? Do you stand back and look at all the works that you have done and measure them up next to the standard of the perfect husband or wife? No, the best way to know that you're in a loving relationship with your spouse is by actually living in fellowship with them. As you live in a way that honors and seeks to please your spouse, you will almost certainly find that that is where the love of your spouse is most clearly known and where the strongest assurance of the truth of your relationship is to be discovered.

It is the same with our relationship with God. If you want to be assured of your relationship with God, seek his face, ask his forgiveness, obey his commandments, live in his presence, seek his good pleasure. As you abide in the love of God in such a way, you will be able to enjoy a much greater assurance of the fact that you have come to know him.

On the other hand, how do you know that someone has not come to a knowledge of God? Look at the fruits that they produce. Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount, not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my father who is in heaven. On that day, many will say to me, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and cast out demons in your name and do many mighty works in your name? And then will I declare to them, I never knew you.

Depart from me, you workers of lawlessness. The person who has truly come to know Christ will live in a manner that manifests that truth. He will keep the word of Christ and in him the love of God will be perfected.

If then we say that we abide in Christ, we must live our lives in fellowship with him and in a way that follows the pattern of his own life. Considering 1 John and other passages in the New Testament, how can we further fill out the picture of what it means to live in the light?