

**Interview with Dr. Dexter Callender**  
**Associate Professor, University of Miami**  
**21 January 2022**

**LaToya Leary:** Hi Dr. Callender. It's great to meet you. Can you start by telling me a little about yourself?



**Dexter Callender:** I am Associate Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Miami. I teach in the area of Hebrew Bible.

**LaToya:** Awesome. Tell me a bit about the project and about how this topic was prompted.

**Dr. Callender:** I was approached by John Kutsko, who is the Executive Director of SBL. John, he's a great visionary with passion for fostering undergraduate education and for mentorship. He came to me and presented the opportunity to coauthor an article for Bible Odyssey with a student and to do so where the student would be the primary author. He sent a list of topics and one of them was Leviathan. I immediately thought that that it was something that is very relevant today.

**LaToya:** Why relevant for today?

**Dr. Callender:** Well, given the state of social and political unrest in the world, I thought that perhaps framing this in terms of Hobbes's Leviathan and the metaphor of the body politic. At the same time, in realizing that this was in collaboration with a student, and one where the student would be the first author, I also thought I needed to allow this to take shape through the sensibilities of the student. That's essentially what we did.

**LaToya:** Awesome. Thank you. What was your role in this project? You iterated that this was a project where the student is the primary writer. How were you able to do that... take a step back and allow the student's voice to be dominant?

**Dr. Callender:** I saw my role as shepherding the student through the process of creating scholarship... allowing him to work through the relevant biblical and extra biblical material, helping him to find and encouraging him to work through the relevant scholarship, and to encourage him to think critically and creatively. Also, I offered feedback throughout the whole process.

**LaToya:** Was there anything surprising in this collaboration? Did anything or anyone exceed your expectations?

**Dr. Callender:** When I was approached with this opportunity and saw the topics, the first person that came to mind for me was Alessandro. And I knew Alessandro was a person who had a many things on his plate in terms of his studies and his work. And I knew that it would be a tight fit for him to be able to pull this

## Leviathan

by Alessandro Rivera | Dexter Callender

Monsters inspire fear, pose an existential threat, and embody the forces of chaos. For the biblical writers and their audiences, Leviathan was just that, and perhaps more.

### How is Leviathan typically portrayed?

Biblical references locate Leviathan within a widespread and venerable tradition of watery serpentine beings. Such monsters embody chaos as cosmic foes of an order-imposing deity. According to Isa 27:1 the Lord will punish Leviathan, "the fleeing serpent," "the twisting serpent," and "the dragon"—phrases that describe the similarly named Litan of Ugaritic literature (KTU 1.5 i:1-3). Similarly, in Ps 74:13-14, the psalmist seeks relief from God, who "broke the heads of the dragon in the waters" and "crushed the heads of Leviathan." Within this broad tradition also stand Tiamat of the Babylonian *Enuma Elish*, Apopis of Egyptian solar mythology, as well as other biblical figures such as Rahab (see Job 26:12; Ps 89:10; Isa 51:10).



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off, but because of his enthusiasm and his capacity to stretch and grow, particularly in these tight situations, he came through amazingly. I learned a great deal from his work on this so it was more than worth it and it was pleasantly surprising.

**LaToya:** Awesome! Thank you so much!