

This summary of Dominick Hernandez's teachings and beliefs comes from two sources:

1. His dissertation: "Will the Lamp of the Wicked Wane?" The Prosperity of the Wicked as a theme in Job and the Ancient Near East
2. His paper to the Bible, Myth, and Myth Theory unit of the Society for Biblical Literature: "Mythopoetic Imagery Relating to the Firstborn of the Dead and the King of Terrors"

I. The Bible and Mythology

Hernandez begins by asking questions about whether the *author of the book of Job* (not Bildad) believed in mythological creatures. (This is based on a misreading of Job 18:14 where Hernandez believes that the "firstborn of death" and "the king of terrors" are actually mythological beings, and not descriptions of disease and death. Since he believes that they are mythological beings, he capitalizes them, "Firstborn of Death" and "King of Terrors," in his writings. This goes beyond liberal translations of the Bible since they do not capitalize them in Job 18:14.)

Terror, calamity, the devouring of human flesh – these are the themes that pervade mythical literature, in which the entities performing these types of actions are figments of the author's creative ingenuity. However, what if this imagery were to, in fact, reflect genuine personages within the cognitive environment of *the writer*, and not simply a figment of *his* imagination? What if *the writer* actually were to believe that such characters exist and that they carry out retribution upon the impious? Could this have been the case of the *author of Job*, in which the "Firstborn of Death" and the "King of Terrors" engage in violence, contributing to the downfall of the wicked? (italics mine, Paper 1)

As you read on, the answer to his questions is, Yes. In the quote below, he directly calls "Firstborn of Death" and "King of Terrors" (capitalized as a proper name) personages and mythological, and he compares them to the mythological Ugaritic god, Mot (also capitalized since it is a proper name of a mythological god).

Since these monikers (i.e. King of Terrors and Firstborn of Death) would have likely been recognized in the ancient Near Eastern cognitive environment, it is important to grasp what *the poet of Job* may have been communicating in that context. This paper will evaluate the relationship of the *mythological* "Firstborn of Death" and the "King of Terrors" to the Ugaritic deity *Mot* (his italics), and consider to what extent these *personages* may have emerged within the ancient Israelite milieu. (italics mine, Paper 1)

His dissertation teaches the same, namely that the "Firstborn of Death" and "King of Terrors" are "entities related to the Canaanite god *Mot*."

While continuing to emphasize the same retribution theology in vv. 13-14, Bildad refers to two terms which function as appellatives for entities related to the Canaanite god *Mot*. (Dissertation, 139)

The conclusion of the paper confirms that *the author of Job* (not Bildad), and therefore the Scriptures, accepted mythological beings as actual and genuine. Notice again the capitalizing of “Firstborn of Death” and “King of Terrors.”

The *author of Job* was operating well within the common understanding of his cognitive environment when *he* warned (*through Bildad*) of these terrors and calamities that would befall the impious. If the *author of Job* believed that horrific beings such as the Firstborn of Death and the King of Terrors truly existed, it is easy to understand why he would include these characters in a speech urging someone to turn from wickedness. (italics mine, Paper 11)

His dissertation has the same conclusion.

The grim allusion to the personified King of Terrors concerning the punishment of the wicked, in close proximity to the mention of the Firstborn of Death, also provokes an inquiry into Canaanite imagery that might clarify the identity of this peculiar being. The insight concerning the identity of the Firstborn of Death as understood through the depiction of the Canaanite deity Mot in v. 13 spurs an appeal to this same imagery to decipher who/what is being referred to as the “King of Terrors.” The traditional conclusion that stems from this methodology results in likening the King of Terrors to the Canaanite deity Mot. This inference is supported by the fact that Death was perceived as a monarch who reigned over the underworld in various ancient cultures. The king of the netherworld in Babylonia, for example, was Nergal, and among the Greeks, Pluto was infernal king. Considering the mythopoetic images stemming from ancient cultures as well as the context of Bildad’s retributive claim, a direct correspondence has been proposed between the King of Terrors and the Canaanite deity Mot.

It is important, however, to be careful not to presume beyond what can reasonably be demonstrated through the ancient Near Eastern materials with regard to the text at hand. There is, at this point, no evidence that the poet of Job was doing anything but utilizing recognizable and understandable terminology of his time. The existence of a king of the underworld in other literatures does not necessarily indicate that this figure must have been derived from a single source—whether this be the Ugaritic Mot or any other comparable figure. The Israelites—and thereby, the poet of Job—were part of the ancient Near Eastern thought world in which Death was personified, considered to be a voracious entity, and in which there was a ruler over the netherworld. Thus, personified Death in Job, though admittedly could have been derived from the Ugaritic deity Mot, could have also quite naturally emerged within the ancient Israelite milieu. Consequently, there seems to be a clear personification of Death in Job 18, but there is no certain evidence that this persona is borrowed from the Canaanites or alludes to this exact Ugaritic deity who is never called a “king.” Since the apparent epithet “King of Terrors” has yet to be found in the Ugaritic corpus of literature, a direct alignment with Mot is uncertain, though possible. (Dissertation, 145-147)

Hernandez sees mythology in other biblical passages as well. Notice again how he capitalizes death as a mythological personage.

Similarly, the imagery of swallowing is associated with the concept of divine judgment. For instance, Isaiah explicitly depicts judgment through God permanently destroying Death by swallowing (Isa 25:8, Dissertation, 85).

Hernandez sees “Death” as “the chaotic force responsible for swallowing others.”

In Isaiah, God swallows Death in a divine act of judgment upon the chaotic force responsible for swallowing others. Death is swallowed and eliminated so that God might bring comfort to God’s people. (Dissertation, 86)

But in Job, God does the opposite of what he did in Isaiah 25:8, “taking on the character of the destructive Ugaritic god *Mot*.” This is blasphemous.

In Job 10:8, Job accuses God doing the exact opposite—God causes chaos by deeming innocent creation wicked, creating injustice by favoring the wicked, and taking on the character of the destructive Ugaritic god *Mot*. (Dissertation, 86)

The identity of Sheol as mythological is also discussed by Hernandez. When Sheol is personified, Hernandez believes that this reflects “mythological material.”

With regard to the identity of Sheol, Hans M. Barstad states, “There appears to be no textual support for the claim that personifications of Sheol in the Hebrew Bible reflect mythological material.” “Sheol,” DDD, 768. At bare minimum, however, this indeed appears to be a case in which Sheol is personified. See also, Hab 2:5. (Dissertation, 85, ft. 279).

Hernandez also parallels Jonah going to Sheol by being swallowed by a large fish to *Mot* swallowing Baal.

Leo Perdue notes, “(l)ike the insatiable *Mot* whose gullet swallows Baal, an image also descriptive of the voracious appetite of Sheol (Prov 1:12), God has turned to devour the creature of his own making.” Perdue, *Wisdom in Revolt*, 143-44, n. 1. See also Jonah 2:1-3, where the large fish takes Jonah to Sheol by means of swallowing him. (Dissertation, 86, ft 283).

Mythology by definition is falsehood and error. The Bible contrasts myth and truth as opposites, Tit 1:14; 1 Tim 4:7; 2 Tim 4:4. Peter (2 Pet 1:16) states that the Apostles did not follow “cleverly devised myths” concerning the Gospel. If the Old Testament teaches myth, then Peter did follow “cleverly devised myths.” The notion that the author of the book of Job accepts “Firstborn of Death” and “King of Terrors” as mythological beings denies the inspiration and inerrancy of the Scriptures.

II. The Book of Job as Non-Historical

Hernandez’s description of the speeches of Job and his friends suggest that they are literary characters. This brings their historicity into doubt.

The *author of Job* was operating well within the common understanding of his cognitive environment when *he* warned (*through Bildad*) of these terrors and calamities that would befall the impious. (Italics mine, Paper 11)

This language above implies that Bildad's speeches are non-historical and that "Bildad's speeches" are a literary device through which the author of Job expresses his views.

Since these monikers (i.e. King of Terrors and Firstborn of Death) would have likely been recognized in the ancient Near Eastern cognitive environment, it is important to grasp what *the poet of Job may have been communicating in that context*. (Italics mine, Paper 1, see also Dissertation, 139)

This quote above implies the same when he talks about what the "poet of Job may have been communicating" about the mythological beings, the "King of Terrors" and the "Firstborn of Death" which is Bildad's speech.

Hernandez teaches the same idea in his dissertation. Again, Bildad and the author of Job are the same:

Likewise, *the genius of the author* is further revealed through the reference to the skin. In Bildad's rebuke, *the author reminds* the reader of the skin ailments that fell upon Job, while the mentioning of the consumption of the "limbs of the skin" alludes to one of the main themes of retribution literature—the inevitable death of the wicked. (Italics mine, Dissertation, 143-144)

The same goes for Job. It is not just how Job depicts the wicked, but how the poet depicts the wicked. Job and the author seem one and the same.

The poetic masterpiece of Job is steeped in metaphor and imagery. Several scholars have pointed out the necessity to unpack the figurative language in Job in order to gain an understanding of *what Job says about the wicked*. . . Therefore, it is necessary to analyze the tropes in Job in order to follow the argumentation throughout the dialogues and grasp how *the poet* depicts the wicked. (Italics mine, Dissertation, 20)

Therefore, it is important to know about whether *the Joban poet* (not Job himself) had knowledge of the Mesopotamian wisdom texts:

It is important to note that, despite the noticeable parallels between Job and Ancient Near Eastern literature, there is no specific evidence conclusively demonstrating that *the Joban poet* had direct knowledge of Mesopotamian wisdom texts. The parallels that are evident between Job and Mesopotamian wisdom literature could have conceivably been inherited in the Canaanite-Israelite literary tradition. (Italics mine, Dissertation, ft 98, p. 30)

Notice that the poetry of Job (that is the direct speeches of Job and his friends) reflect the genius of the writer (of Job), not Job and his friends:

An improved understanding of the rhetoric and imagery of these sections will inevitably inspire heightened appreciation of the poetry of Job, and reflect the genius of the writer. (Dissertation, 34)

These passages imply that Job and his friends are simply literary characters through whom the author speaks. Hernandez's writings, therefore, cast doubt on their historicity. We would never say, "Matthew speaking through Jesus says." Jesus's words are his words, not Matthew's. They are Jesus's words found in the book of Matthew. The Bible affirms the historicity of Job in the book of Job itself (see the whole book) and Ezekiel 14:14, 20; James 5:11. Claiming, implying, or just poorly communicating that Job and his friends are non-historical compromise the integrity of Scripture.

III. The Book of Job's "Criticism" of Other Biblical Teachings

Hernandez correctly maintains that the Bible teaches the doctrine of divine retribution.

Not only is the issue of divine retribution prevalent in the Bible, but the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls have (sic) demonstrated that divine retribution continued to be at the forefront of Jewish thought in the following years. (Dissertation, 289)

Yet, he asserts that the book of Job corrects or contradicts the doctrine of divine retribution taught in other biblical passages. Hernandez's believes that the book of Job's greatest contribution to wisdom literature is through Job's criticism of the traditional wisdom espoused in Proverbs and in the Torah. That is, the book of Job or the author of Job critiques other biblical passages and teachings through "the speeches" of Job. Hence, Hernandez states in his dissertation:

Job's overt allegations relating to the inconsistency of God's justice, coupled with the notion that the wicked prosper with no divine restraint, is revolutionary when compared to other sections of the Bible. Although Jeremiah manifests an affinity to Job as a result of his personal experience with the wicked, sections of Psalms, Proverbs, and Deuteronomy appear to support Job's friends' conventional wisdom by explicitly indicating divinely-appointed rewards for obedience and just retribution for punishment. Not only is the retribution theme shared by other biblical literature, but the expression of this theme is carried out by using similar rhetoric and imagery to those of Job. As one branches out from the Bible to extra-biblical wisdom texts of the ancient Near East, it is readily noticeable that several of the "righteous sufferer" compositions similarly exhibit the prevalence of the doctrine of just retribution by conspicuously utilizing comparable language and imagery to communicate corresponding ideas, and make similar claims to those in Job.

These observations prompt an inquiry into the purpose of Job's intense emphasis upon the prosperity of the wicked in response to his friends' retribution dogma. What is the objective of Job arguing against retribution by proclaiming the prosperity of the wicked—an assertion that distinctly runs contrary to traditional biblical and ancient Near Eastern wisdom? (Dissertation, ii)

Hernandez later states.

Bendt Alster notes that, “a critical attitude towards existing values...may be considered an unmistakable sign of ancient Near Eastern ‘wisdom’ literature.” In Job, there is a full-blown clash between the traditional and the critical—between Job’s friends’ wisdom and what Job presents as a sort of counter-wisdom. Given Alster’s well-founded statement, Job’s extremely critical position on traditional wisdom, voiced through his observations relating to the prosperity of the wicked, might be the essence of wisdom in the book. Perhaps it is through Job’s criticism of the traditional wisdom espoused in Proverbs and in the Torah that the book of Job makes its greatest contribution to the wisdom tradition. The conventional biblical principles concerning retribution that Job criticizes are held in common with several thematically comparable ancient Near Eastern compositions that use similar imagery and rhetoric to address the same issues as Job. Therefore, the idea that Job provides wisdom in presenting the contrary to that which was generally considered to be wise in the Bible and ancient Near East deserves further investigation. (Dissertation, 288-289)

And similarly.

This irreverent response, as well as Job’s overt rejection of traditional wisdom—and with it, the application of just retribution theology to his circumstances—provokes Zophar’s accusation of Job necessarily having sinned. (Dissertation, iv)

This is evident in Job, according to Walton, in that the author uses the mentality of the ancient Near East—represented in the just retribution paradigm of Job’s friends—with the intent of countering it, thereby accomplishing the point of the book. (Dissertation, 33)

Job however dissents from the traditional biblical opinion shared with several ancient Near Eastern compositions. (Dissertation, 281)

Therefore, the idea that Job provides wisdom in presenting the contrary to that which was generally considered to be wise in the Bible and ancient Near East deserves further investigation. (Dissertation, 289)

The last two quotes above state that the teaching of the book of Job are “contrary” to other teachings of Scripture that are “considered to be wise.” Job, therefore, “dissents” from “traditional biblical opinion.” These statements communicate that the teachings of the book of Job contradicts genuine biblical teaching or doctrine taught in other biblical passages.

The understanding of just retribution in the eschaton and the dichotomy between light and darkness to differentiate between good and evil emerge in early Christianity as well, which is evident in the writings of the New Testament (cf. 1 Cor 3:12-15; 2 Cor

5:10; Jn 1:5; 3:19-21; 8:12; 9:4-5; 11:9-10; 12:35-36, 46). Just retribution theology did not fade after Job—despite his harsh words against the doctrine. (Dissertation, 289)

Hernandez's statement above, especially the last sentence, declares that Job rejected with "his harsh words" the teachings of the New Testament of a just retribution at the end of time. Hernandez teaches that Scripture contradicts Scripture.

IV. Insufficiency of Scripture

Hernandez also asserts that one can sometimes look outside of the Bible, for instance to Ancient Near Eastern literature, for better information or explanations about the fate of the wicked than the Bible itself.

"Even better exegetical explanations of various [biblical] passages dealing with the fate of the wicked can be accomplished by looking outside of the Bible and gleaning from comparable ancient Near Eastern literature that exhibits analogous language and word pictures." (Dissertation, p 21. The word in brackets is mine.)

And again, we can only competently translate and interpret the Bible through Ancient Near Eastern materials.

Nevertheless, both Dhorme and Tur-Sinai demonstrated through their attention to ancient Near Eastern materials for philological purposes, that an awareness of the literature of the world of the Bible had become indispensable in order to competently translate and interpret Job. (Dissertation, 8)

Hernandez again directs us outside of the Bible to Ancient Near Eastern mythical texts to help us "competently interpret" Job.

This suspicion is confirmed upon investigating the identity and action of the Firstborn of Death which is depicted as consuming his prey. This is the only time such a character is mentioned in the Bible. Thus it is imperative to look to the ancient Near Eastern materials to see if any information might be gleaned that could provide a landscape for understanding this character. It is important to note that no discernible character named the Firstborn of Death has been discovered elsewhere in ancient Near Eastern literature. Yet, since the Firstborn of Death is personified through its eating in v. 13, it is reasonable to look into the Canaanite parallels of Mot, the god of the netherworld.

Sure enough, in Ugaritic texts there are references to Mot swallowing his victims similarly to the Firstborn of Death in Job. For example, the insatiable appetite of Mot is alluded to in The Baal Cycle: (Dissertation, 141-142)

Conclusions:

1. Hernandez teaches that the authors of Scripture believed in mythological beings and taught about these beings to urge people to turn from wickedness.
2. That author of Job expresses his views through the “speeches” of Job and his friends. The speeches of Job and his friends, therefore, are non-historical, which suggests that the book is also non-historical.
3. That the author of Job (through Job), “critiques,” “dissents,” “has harsh words,” and “presents the contrary to that which was generally considered to be wise in the Bible.” These statements logically demand that the Bible contradicts itself. Furthermore, the doctrine of divine retribution developed and became prevalent later in the Jewish community. The Old Testament teaches otherwise.
4. Hernandez believes that the Ancient Near Eastern materials are “indispensable” to translate and interpret the Bible competently. Moreover, Ancient Near Eastern myths sometimes furnish better sources for interpreting the Bible than other biblical passages interpreting the Bible.

During the interview with Hernandez, I asked him if the authors of Scripture believed and taught that death was an actual being. He responded, “That does not have to be the case, but I would not have a problem if they did (believe that death was an actual being).” Because members of the committee who interviewed him did not think that he said that, I asked him the same question again at lunch. He gave the same answer again.

President Mohler knew of these concerns when he interviewed Dominick Hernandez. He hired him anyway.

When I was summoned to meet with Mohler, Hall, and York in May 22, 2019, Mohler defended Hernandez by saying that everyone in my department disagrees with me. York also told me a couple of times that I had misread Hernandez’s work and that everyone disagrees with me.

Sadly, neither Mohler, York, or anyone else on the faculty has made a serious attempt to demonstrate that my reading of Hernandez is inaccurate.

Russell Fuller