

## **The Book of Job**

### **Session 21: God's Speech 1 and Job's Response (Job 28-40.5)**

**By John Walton**

This is Dr. John Walton and his teaching on the Book of Job. This is session 21, God's Speech 1 and Job's Response, Job 38-40:5.

#### **Introduction to the Yahweh Speeches (Job 38-40:5) [00:28-1:52]**

Now we finally get to the most important part of the book: Yahweh's speeches. This is, of course, the third discourse section. We've had Job's Oath of Innocence hanging in the air as we experienced the suspense. And so, now we find that Yahweh is going to arrive and speak.

It begins by saying that the Lord spoke to Job out of the storm, the whirlwind. This is usually the accompaniment of God's presence, but it also has the inference that he's not particularly happy with what's going on. We find, of course, that God does bring a corrective to everyone's thinking.

What's intriguing is that he does not respond to Job's oath of innocence. So, this cannot be construed as Job having forced God's hand. He doesn't defend his justice, which is very interesting because everyone else has set up the system based on justice.

#### **Complexity in the Non-ordered World [1:52-3:18]**

So, what we find is that instead, he takes a totally different tact, and as a matter of fact, when he starts, you wonder where he is coming from. What's going on? What he is doing is he's trying to demonstrate the complexity of the world. Even we would affirm the complexity of the ordered world. He deals with lots of issues that are on the very edge, the extreme areas of the ordered world, things that humans didn't understand very well. By showing the complexity of the world, he's demonstrating Job's ignorance of how it works and how it's ordered. This is important because Job and his friends have been working with the premise that they understand how the world is ordered, and it's ordered according to justice and the retribution principle. What Yahweh does in his speech is that

he demonstrates, indeed, he asserts, that there is order where people thought that there was non-order.

### **Order, Non-order, and Disorder [3:18-5:45]**

Now, at this point, I need to take a moment and explain my terminology. I use non-order, order, and disorder. Non-order is not evil in nature. Sometimes it's called chaos, but that's not good because that suggests perhaps something personified or something that is inherently evil. Non-order is neutral. It just hasn't been ordered yet.

I think of a situation where you're moving into a new place, and you bring in all your packed-up boxes and set them around the room, ready to bring order to your new home. The boxes represent non-order. Nothing's working the way that it's supposed to; nothing is purposefully placed or accessible. It's just all packed into the boxes, non-order, ready to be ordered. Genesis 1 starts with non-order in verse two, and God's creative acts bring order. So, creation is an order-bringing process. Proverbs tells us that God creates through wisdom, and wisdom, as we've talked about already, is the pursuit of order and putting things, understanding things, in orderly ways. So, non-order is the beginning part of the process.

By the way, that's true in almost all ancient Near Eastern cosmologies. They start with non-order. Then you get order. When God creates in Genesis, he doesn't dissolve all non-order; after all, there's an inside the garden ordered space and an outside the garden, non-ordered space. The sea is still there, non-order. And so, God has brought an optimal order. That's what it means when he keeps saying it is good. It is functioning the way it needs to in this ordered system. Most of the ancient Near Eastern folks talk about this same kind of concept; in Egypt, we have the concept of Ma'at, which is order.

This is the focus of all kinds of literature in the ancient world. Cosmologies and law or in the inscriptions often talk about how the king brings order. So, order is very important.

But there is still the non-ordered world. People are made in the image of God to help in bringing order. We are partnering with God, vice-regents, participating in his

plans for order-bringing. So, we still have non-order in the world and we have order as God has brought it.

But then there's a third element disorder. I use that to describe these threats against order that are derived from evil. Disorder is something that is inherently evil. So, we live in a world of order, non-order, and disorder.

### **Job and Non-order and the Retribution Principle [5:45-8:08]**

Job and his friends have thought that all non-order in their lives, suffering, and things of that sort come from disorder and evil actions; that's the retribution principle. So, as God talks about areas of the cosmos that demonstrate that there is even order to non-order, that even things that are perceived as non-ordered have order, he's showing that they are, Job and his friends, that they are not really sufficiently knowledgeable about order to lay out an equation. So, in doing so, God refutes the confident formulation of a theory that reduces the operations of the world to a single simple proposition, the retribution principle. In the process, he rejects the idea that justice is the foundation of the system.

### **Job 38 and Non-order [8:08-10:44]**

We can see that when we look in chapter 38, as he's talking about the ordered world, and we start, let me see, "Have you comprehended the vast expanses of the earth?" I'm in verse 18, "Tell me if you know all of this. What is the way to the abode of light? Where does darkness reside? Can you take them to their places? Do you know the paths to their dwellings? Surely you know, for you were already born, you've lived so many years."

Notice, by the way, this ring of sarcasm. I've mentioned the idea that even the Yahweh speeches are literary constructs. I don't think we should consider God as engaging in sarcasm. This is put in his mouth to make the point.

"Have you entered the storehouses of the snow or seen the storehouses of the hail, which I reserve for times of trouble, for the days of war and battle? What is the way to the place where the lightning is dispersed, as the place where the east winds are

scattered over the earth?" Notice as he's talking all about these cosmic operations, and do you know how they work, Job? But look, especially verse 25, "Who cuts a channel for the torrents of rain, and the path for the thunderstorm, to a land where no one lives, an uninhabited desert." You see, the retribution principle is justice. As the foundation of the system, rain has a role in the justice system. It can bring judgment, the floods; it can bring prosperity, bringing fecundity to the earth and growing plants.

God makes a point; haven't you noticed that it rains where nobody lives? The rain is not operating here in a justice system. God certainly can use it that way. He mentioned just a few verses earlier the idea that he's reserved for times of trouble. So, God can use those things, but they don't always operate in a justice system.

### **Contra Retribution Principle and Justice as Basis [10:44-11:50]**

And so, we find here that God is disabusing Job of some of his assumptions as he makes him aware of his ignorance. All of this shows that the retribution principle is not an appropriate formula for understanding how the world works.

Job's response to this we find in the first verses of chapter 40. God says the challenge: "Will the one who contends with the Almighty correct him? Let him who accuses God answer him!" stand forth Job. Job answered, "I am unworthy--how can I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth. I spoke once, but I have no answer--twice, I will say no more." Job acknowledges his inability to answer God's questions. That's not enough.

### **Ignorance is Not Enough [11:50-12:56]**

The goal of the book is more than just, "Okay, we know nothing." Confessed ignorance doesn't get us to the solutions the book has to offer. The book wants to help us develop a conviction about how to think about how the world is ordered and God's policies. We find, of course, that Job himself has spoken ill of God. God's going to challenge him on that. We'll pick that up in the next section as the introduction to God's second speech, which is going to not just bring the negative, what we don't know, but it's

going to give some positive advice, and it's going to do it through these two amazing creatures, Behemoth and Leviathan.

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