

The Book of Job
Session 22: God's Speech 2, Behemoth and Leviathan
and Job's Response (Job 40:6-41:34)

By John Walton

This is John Walton and his teaching on the Book of Job. This is session 22, God's Speech 2, Behemoth and Leviathan, and Job's response, Job 40:6-41:34.

Introduction to God's Speech 2 [00:31-1:12]

Now we finally get to Yahweh's second speech. We're going to move beyond the ignorance of humans to actually get to the idea of how people are supposed to think. It's intriguing that this core message of the book is in the part of the book that has been considered most inaccessible, most confusing, and basically, people just throw up their hands and say they don't know what to do with it. Yet, it contains precisely how the book wants us to think. We're going to have some fun with it.

Yahweh Speaks [1:12-2:31]

Let's take a look. It starts off as God introduces his second speech in verse six of chapter 40. And again, Yahweh speaks out of the storm. Remember here, if I haven't mentioned it, Yahweh is speaking. It's not Elohim. It's not Shaddai. It's not Adonai. It's Yahweh speaking. We had Yahweh in the prologue, and now we have Yahweh speeches at the end. Again, that gives us an Israelite feel. Job has spoken of El Shaddai, but it's Yahweh who comes to clarify. And so, it's interesting that Yahweh is speaking.

So, we read his first few lines in this address to Job, "Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you will answer me" [40:7]. Of course, Job's been the one asking the questions. Job's been the one making the demands. Job's been trying to deal with Yahweh's silence. And now Yahweh is not coming to answer; he's coming to question. So, Job had all his questions, and now there's none left on the table, so to speak. Job has put his hand over his mouth. So, he's done asking his questions. Now Yahweh's going to question him.

Job's Questioning God's Justice [2:31-4:37]

Verse eight is very important. He says, "Would you discredit my justice? Would you condemn me to justify yourself?" We can see then if it hasn't been clear in Job's speeches, we can see that Job has called into question God's justice. Yahweh himself says so. So again, we're reminded that Job has not done justice to God's reputation. Job has not responded well to everything that has taken place. Job has not expressed a good sense of God. So, here that's made very clear. And now what God does is he challenges Job. "Do you have an arm like God's, can your voice thunder like his? Adorning yourself with glory and splendor, and clothe yourself in honor and majesty. Unleash the fury of your wrath." It's as if Yahweh is saying, "Okay, Job, try being God for a day. Do you really think you've got this all figured out how it works? Well, let's see how well that all works." Verse 12, "Look at all those who are proud and humble them, crush the wicked where they stand." Do you think that's how the system works, justice as a foundation? He says, "It would be worth seeing if you could actually pull it off."

But now he turns his attention to the two creatures, Behemoth and Leviathan. He reprimanded Job for considering his own righteousness, Job's righteousness, as a basis for questioning God's justice. He rhetorically challenges Job's ability to impose justice on the world, right? Job thinks that's what God does--the retribution principle. God challenges Job to impose justice on the world.

Identity of Behemoth and Leviathan [4:37-5:44]

And so, he introduces these characters Behemoth and Leviathan, to address the desired posture that people should have. Let's start by talking about their identity. They are not known natural species nor now extinct ones. I'm not going to go into much detail on that, but it really is pretty clear when we examine the features of these creatures. They simply don't match up with anything that we know. The element in Leviathan that's most difficult to match up with any biological or extinct species is breathing fire. We really

don't know of anyone that does that, any creature that does that. And so, in that sense, we have to look elsewhere.

Chaos Creatures [5:44-11:07]

I would propose that they are chaos creatures. Chaos creatures are a well-known category in the ancient Near East and very, very easily recognizable by the ancient audience. They know exactly about chaos creatures. Leviathan is a known chaos creature, not only in the other places in the Hebrew Bible but also in the Ugaritic texts.

Chaos creatures are liminal creatures that exist on the periphery of the ordered world, almost like one foot and one foot out. They are quintessential creatures whose abstract characteristics are shared by known animals. The idea that some people have seen some semblance of a hippopotamus in Behemoth or some semblance of a crocodile in Leviathan only goes so far as to suggest that a hippopotamus or a crocodile would be, sort of, the spawn of Behemoth or Leviathan. Their cohorts and not that Behemoth actually is a hippopotamus or that Leviathan actually is a crocodile.

The category of chaos creatures is populated by, as I said, liminal creatures kind of on the edges that have been seen, such as coyote or owl or ostrich or hyena, as well as fearsome beasts only seen in the eyes of the imagination. Both types are in this category of chaos creatures. The latter group, these fearsome beasts, is not strictly zoological. In fact, they are often composite creatures. So, the head of a lion, the wings of an eagle, griffin-like or sphinx-like creatures. And so, chaos creatures are often composite, but not always.

The chaos creatures are considered to have been created by God. We see this, especially in Genesis 1, the great ocean creatures, and in 1:21. But they represent the potential for continuing non-order, like the thorns and thistles in the less ordered realm outside the garden. The thorns and thistles are evidence of non-order, yet they're in a partially ordered world.

When God talks about Leviathan in Psalm 104, he made Leviathan to sport with. When the great seagoing creatures are referred to in Genesis 1:21 they're part of God's creation. In fact, Genesis comes back and uses the word "*bara*" to create, for the first time in Genesis 1, since verse 1, to specifically attach it to the sea monsters, just to make it clear that they are also part of the ordered system. So, in one sense, we could call them anti-cosmos creatures. They kind of work against the cosmos, but they're not strictly in the realm of non-order. They're part of the ordered world, but they serve as agents of non-order by virtue of their mindless nature. Chaos creatures are not morally evil, but they can do serious harm because they just operate by instinct.

So, in one sense, we could compare to how we might think of a tornado. It's not morally evil, but it can do serious harm because it does what tornadoes do. Chaos creatures, then, are not enemies of God, but they can wreak havoc among humans.

Just as the sea is in the realm of non-order, it is controlled by God with its boundary set. These creatures are not domesticated in any sense. Yet they're under God's control.

Behemoth is actually the plural of the word "cattle," and it refers to the most potent land animal imaginable. It's sort of an abstraction of land animals.

Leviathan would be the most potent sea creature imaginable. And so, the text uses these to sort of characterize chaos creatures. And again, hippopotami and crocodiles are certainly dangerous, and they may loosely be considered as the spawn or minions of chaos creatures, such as these.

Role of Behemoth and Leviathan as Literary Characters [11:07-12:06]

Now, having said this, we should recognize that the identity of the creatures is not as important as recognizing their literary role as characters in the book. The ancient audience would have recognized Behemoth and Leviathan. They would have had identities connected to them. But regardless of that, Behemoth and Leviathan are being used by the author of the book as characters, literary characters that have a role and a purpose in the book. If we're going to understand the authoritative message of the book

using these literary characters, we have to look beyond the controversies of identity to see how they are used.

Chaos Creatures Elsewhere in Job [12:06-14:08]

Chaos creatures have been referred to in the book on numerous occasions. So, reading through the book, we've already seen those. Job's lament in chapter three spoke of those who were ready to take on Leviathan in 3:8. Job's first response to Eliphaz asked why God was treating him as a chaos creature. That's in 7:12. There he uses the Hebrew word *tannim*, which is the same Hebrew word in Genesis 1:21. Job feels like he's being treated as a chaos creature because God is keeping him under guard. Now that fits with what we know in the ancient Near East. The gods in the ancient Near East were known to keep partially domesticated chaos creatures on a leash and to use them for their purposes, even though they represented this realm of non-order. So, Job suggests that God himself is then acting like a chaos creature in chapter 30, verses 15 through 23.

God is not treating Job as a chaos creature as much as he's asking Job to step into the role of Behemoth. God is not acting like a chaos creature. Instead, he is far superior to Leviathan and should be recognized as such. Now that's introducing, I believe, how Behemoth and Leviathan are being used in the text. Again, Job has accused God of acting like a chaos creature, and God says, "Oh, no, it's worse than that. It's bigger than that." And so, we're going to get that explained to us as we observe what is being said. We need to analyze Behemoth and Leviathan, not for their identity but for their literary role.

Behemoth and Job Compared [14:08-16:08]

So, when we open up to chapter 40, verse 15, God directs Job's attention to Behemoth. "Look at Behemoth," and then pay attention to the next line. "Look at Behemoth, which I made along with you." Job and Behemoth are grouped together. God has created both. It's interesting that when we look through that brief section dealing with

Behemoth, it goes through verse 24, so 15 through 24. Yahweh does not speak of either Job or himself as doing anything to Behemoth. In verse 15, Behemoth is content and well-fed, as Job has been. You remember 15 introduced the comparison. So, Behemoth is content and well-fed as Job has been. In 16 through 18, God made Behemoth strong as he made Job. In 19, Behemoth ranks first among its kind, as Job does. That was identified in 15:7. In verse 20, Behemoth is cared for, as Job was. In 21 to 22 of chapter 40, Behemoth is sheltered as Job was. In 23, now it's starting to make a transition 23 and 24, the end of the Behemoth section. In 23, Behemoth is not alarmed by the raging river. Inference or implication is rather, and neither should you be. He trusts and is secure, as you should be. He cannot be captured or trapped, to which you should also be invulnerable and have shown yourself resistant. Verse 24 talks about "Can anyone capture it by the eyes, or trap it and pierce its nose?" The word for "nose" is the word for anger. "and cannot be pierced" This is a difficult word in the text; it sometimes means "named" or "designated" or "penetrated." So again, the idea is here to which you should be invulnerable.

Behemoth is being compared to Job. That's introduced right in the first verse. After that everything we read about Behemoth, we should compare it to Job. That's how this section is working. Job then should be like Behemoth. Remember Job had complained, "you are treating me like a chaos creature." Here, the speech says, "well, you should be a little more like a chaos creature in this regard." We'll come back to that.

Yahweh is Greater than Leviathan [16:08-22:44]

Let's turn to Leviathan. A longer section, and again let's pay attention to what it says and what it doesn't say. The first eight verses use the second-person form. "Can you do this? Can you do that?" is in the second-person form. Focusing on what Job can and cannot do to Leviathan.

With a little bit, I think more than a little bit of the idea: If you can't do these things to Leviathan, pull it in with a fish hook, tie down its tongue, put a cord through its

nose, okay. Will it beg for mercy? Will it be gentle with you? Can you make an agreement with it? Can you make a pet of it? If you wouldn't do that with Leviathan, why would you expect to do it to Yahweh? Why would you expect to trap him? Pin his tongue down, make an agreement with him, and domesticate him. Why would you do it?

The switch to the second person suggests that Leviathan is to be compared to Yahweh. So, 41:3, "Will it keep begging you for mercy?" That's what Job kind of wanted God to do. Verses 10 and 11, "No one is fierce enough to rouse it. Who then is able to stand against me? Who has a claim against me that I must pay?" Yahweh himself draws the connection between himself and Leviathan. Not so much that he is like Leviathan, but that he is so much greater than Leviathan. If you can't act toward Leviathan in this way, why in the world would you think that you can act toward Yahweh in this way?

This section never talks about what God does to Leviathan. Yet so many interpreters have gone in that direction. This does not talk about Yahweh's control of Leviathan. It does not talk about Yahweh defeating Leviathan. We've got a different sort of statement being made here.

In chapter 41, as we move through this information, Leviathan cannot be controlled, and neither can Yahweh. Leviathan will not submit or beg for mercy; neither will Yahweh. Leviathan can't be wounded or subdued. It's hopeless to struggle against him. The same is true for Yahweh.

We read the outright comparison in 10 and 11; no one, including you, has a claim against me, Job. In 12 through 18, you can't force open his mouth to receive the bridle. Do we get that? What has Job been trying to do? He's been trying to harness and bridle Yahweh. Yahweh cannot be controlled or domesticated. He is not tame. 19 through 25, Leviathan is dangerous when riled, as is Yahweh. 26 through 32, Leviathan is invulnerable, as is Yahweh. Verse 33, no creature is his equal. That implies, of course, that Job is not Leviathan's equal, let alone being Yahweh's equal. Verse 34 Leviathan dominates all who are proud. Compare that to the opening of this speech in 11 through

14, where God says to Job, you know, arm yourself, dominate those who are evil. It's Leviathan who dominates all who are proud. Job cannot humble the proud back to chapter 40, verses 11 and 12. Nor can he subdue the King over the proud, 41:34. God is also King of the proud in that sense. He rules over them. All of this discusses what Job can't do to Leviathan. They are also things the Job must learn he cannot do to Yahweh. So, what Job must learn, and it's what we all must learn, we cannot domesticate God.

Role of Chaos Creatures in the Message of the Book [22:44-24:19]

So, the role of these creatures in the message of the book, first of all, they are not portrayed as the embodiment of cosmic evil. One interpreter has even suggested that they are equivalent to the Challenger at the beginning of the book. I see it as almost totally opposite of that. Neither creature is described as evil, neither creature represents *hasatan*, the Challenger, nor do they take up the role or the position of the Challenger from the early chapters. They're not described in such a way that they can serve as evidence of God's ability to subdue threats to order in the world and to bring cosmic justice. The text just doesn't treat them that way. It doesn't present them that way.

There's no reference to God's subduing them. So, how can they stand as testimony to God subduing, non-order? We have to go with what the text says. Cosmic justice is neither hanging in the balance nor the result of what Yahweh is said to do. The book does not assert that God brings justice either to the cosmos as a whole or to human experience. The book does not make that claim. That's the claim Job and his friends wanted to make through the retribution principle.

Not about Justice [24:19-24:52]

The first speech of Yahweh indicated how Job should not think. The second speech indicates how Job should think. In neither speech does Yahweh address Job's righteousness or his own justice. This contains the closest that we have to an explicit message, which is what we would expect in Yahweh's climactic speech.

Humans Should Trust as Behemoth Does [24:52-25:47]

The point made concerning Behemoth involves its stability in the surging waters. Behemoth is not righteous. Leviathan is not just. Behemoth cannot be moved. Leviathan cannot be challenged. Yahweh does not defeat them or harness them to show his superiority over them. They are used as illustrations from which humans can learn some important lessons. Humans should respond to raging rivers with security and trust, as Behemoth does in this literary presentation.

Humans should not think that they can domesticate or challenge Yahweh since they can't challenge or domesticate Leviathan, who is inferior to Yahweh.

Humans Cannot Tame Leviathan or God; Job's Response [25:47-27:10]

Job's second response in chapter 42, verses two through six, shows that he understands the points Yahweh's making. I'll read it quickly. "I know that you can do all things; no purpose of yours can be thwarted." Again, that means Job can't tame him or domesticate him for Job's own purposes. "You asked, 'Who is this that obscures my plans without knowledge?'" Notice obscuring God's plans here; Job obscured God's plans because he indicated that God's plans were to carry out the retribution principle to order the cosmos according to justice. That addresses God's plans. Who obscures God's plans without knowledge. "Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know." Wonderful is, basically, it's beyond the human pay grade. You can't understand it.

Job Recants and Submits [27:10-30:47]

"You said, 'Listen now, and I will speak; I will question you, and you will answer me.' My ears had heard of you, but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes." Again, to me, this shows that he acknowledges that he had been presumptuous in what he thought he knew. He recants, and he submits. This isn't like his first response where he just said, I'm done talking. He recants, and he submits.

The Hebrew word here for "too wonderful for me," things I did not know. The Hebrew word *pele* refers to information in the divine realm that is beyond human understanding.

On the word "repent." Let's say a little bit about that. It's in verse six, "repent in dust and ashes." It's the Niphal form of the verb. It's distinguished from other words that can be translated as "repent." Eliphaz had urged him to repent. That was the word *shuv*, to turn back, to change direction, change his behavior. Here Job does not suggest behavior change but rather wishes to retract his previous statements. He employs the same verbal form that's used when God changes his mind in places like Exodus 32:14, Jeremiah 4:28, Jeremiah 18:10, Joel 2:13, and Jonah 3:10. Therefore, all intriguing passages that, unfortunately, we can't spend the time addressing.

Many of its occurrences take place in situations involving regret. It's an expression of regret. In Job's statements, he regrets his previous statements. His characterization of God is a presumptuous belief in his own understanding, his arrogant challenges. That's how we would understand Job's regret.

The statement here opens up other issues as well. When used with the preposition *'al* as here, it typically means to reconsider something or, more often, to put something out of mind, to forget all about it. In this verse, we might suggest that that's something that he puts out of his mind. This is dust and ashes; that's what it says. It says he has, well, it says, "repent concerning"--*'al*. So, he puts out of his mind this dust and ashes. It's not repenting with dust and ashes. That's not the preposition here. Rather, he reconsiders the whole dust and ashes thing, and he puts dust and ashes out of his mind. He has therefore announced the end to his mourning, and he has accepted his reality.

Importance of Behemoth and Leviathan [30:47-31:29]

We can see then that Behemoth and Leviathan are extremely important characters in the shaping of the book. This is not about hippopotami and crocodiles. It's not about dinosaurs. It's not about whether we're talking mythology or things of that sort. It's really not even about chaos creatures though they are. It's about how these creatures

are portrayed and how that stands as a message to Job and to all of us reading the book. And we'll address those issues as we move to other segments.

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