

The Book of Job

Session 25: The World in the Book of Job:

Order, Non-order, and Disorder

By John Walton

This is Dr. John Walton and his teaching on the Book of Job. This is session 25, The World in the Book of Job: Order, Non-order, and Disorder.

Introduction [00:27-00:58]

Now we want to talk about how we should think about the world around us. How God operates in the world is based on what we're given in the Book of Job. We've already introduced the concept of non-order, order, and disorder. We'll review that a bit here and then talk about what the significance of that is in the book of Job and in our theology.

Creation: Order, Non-order, and Disorder [00:58-3:48]

Creation was, most importantly, an act of ordering the cosmos, making everything function the way God wanted it to. That's the most important aspect of creation in the ancient world and arguably in our world, our way of thinking, as well. It's not enough just to make objects. God did that, of course. He made objects, but everything was to be brought under his control in an ordered system that served its purposes. And that goes way beyond the material. That's that ordering process of creation.

Genesis one, as we mentioned, started with non-ordering verse two, the primordial situation in which raw materials were present but still needed to be assigned their role and function according to God's purposes. We use the illustration of the boxes that needed to be unpacked. The rooms that needed to be arranged. This non-order, again, is not evil. It's just not completed in its final form. It's a work in progress.

The initial work of ordering creation did not result in total order, and that was by design. The sea is a place of non-order. Outside the garden did not feature the same level of order as inside the garden. These are all things we're just reviewing here. People were

created to work alongside of God to continue the process of ordering as vice-regents in his image.

God was not somehow incapable of achieving total order, or somehow we shouldn't think that he failed in doing so. In his wisdom, he chose to work through an extended process and bring people into partnership along the way. Even before the fall, people lived in a world that was characterized both by the established order, but also by continuing non-order.

It's in Genesis three that disorder enters the picture. Disorder, as we mentioned, reflects that which is evil, and it's done by people. There may be cosmic forces of evil as well, but the disorder in the world is largely pinned on people.

So, we live in a world that's characterized by order, as God has established it, by continuing non-order, which has not yet been addressed and is dominated, unfortunately, by disorder. The world around us then is not fully endowed with God's attributes. That's one of the most important points that the Book of Job has to make about the world.

Retribution Principle [3:48-5:06]

Job and his friends adopted the retribution principle as the foundation of the cosmos because they somehow believed that God's justice was infused into the natural world and that the world operated in accordance with God's attributes. That is not the case. Again, it's a fallen world. There is disorder. There continues to be non-order. The regular operations of the world do not reflect the natural character or attributes of God.

Wisdom and Non-order [5:06-7:39]

It was his wisdom that decided to bring order gradually. Now he can impose his will at any time and in any way. But he has set up a realm in this cosmos where non-order remained and where disorder was allowed to intrude. Again, recall Yahweh's own insistence that rains and floods are not automatically to be considered responses of his justice or blessing or punishment. It rains where no one lives. Natural disasters, things that we call natural disasters, hurricanes, tsunamis, earthquakes, tornadoes, droughts,

famines, plagues, epidemics as well as devastating experiences at a biological level mutations can all be identified as aspects of non-order in the world.

Some have made the point that some of those natural disasters actually have positive results in the larger ecosystem and in the cosmos. That's only another indication that God can use non-order to achieve ordered objectives. Now, of course, these natural disasters as we call them, can have a severely negative impact. God could potentially use them as punishment, but we never can know when he is using them as punishment or when he is not. They're not intrinsically evil in any moral sense, yet they're not impervious to God's control. But they cannot be considered instruments, wielded in judgment every time we see them. They don't operate independently of God, but we shouldn't picture him as holding a remote control device to figure out which houses are going to get hit by the tornado and which ones aren't. They're subject to his bidding as humans are, though we are not robots. So, there's no remote control. They are biddable, subject to God's control, yet not mechanical.

God's Control and Wisdom [7:39-9:08]

So, what do we learn about God's control? If the cosmos is not subject to his attributes and if the things we experience could be used by him for reward or punishment, but not always. Then how do we think about God's control in the world?

It's interesting that we don't raise questions about why gravity worked in a certain situation. Neither should we ask why it rained in one place and not in another. We don't raise questions about why a bone breaks when we fall, and neither should we ask why one person gets diabetes or cancer and another does not. God's wisdom is founded in the world in the way that he chose to create it. It's not to be found in each expression of gravity or cell division.

His wisdom is not in the specifics. It's in the way he set the world up to work. Understanding God's control is more connected to the cosmic system than to our own individual personal experiences or conduct.

Justice, not the Linchpin of the Cosmos [9:08-11:09]

Now, still, that can lead people to ask, why did God devise this system the way that he did? It doesn't always look wise to us, but that's not a question we can answer. We can say, based on the Book of Job he did not do it for the sake of justice. Justice is not the linchpin of the cosmos. Forces that God built into the world are not discerning. They are not volitional. They're not moral, and God doesn't micromanage.

There's more to the world, more to the operations of the cosmos than justice. If justice were at the core of everything, we would not exist. We are fallen creatures. In his wisdom, God orders the cosmos to work the way that it does. He is able to interfere. He is even able to micromanage, should he choose to do so, but that's not typical.

In its fallen state, the world can only operate by his wisdom. We cannot assess everything in terms of his justice. This is the message of the Book of Job to help us understand the world doesn't necessarily operate the way that we think that it does or the way that we think that it should. God, in his wisdom, has set it up. Well, that should lead us to think now about God in the Book of Job, and that'll be our next segment.

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