

## Dr. John Walton, Job, Session 21 God Speech, Part 1, and Job's Response (Job 38-40:5) Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Study Guide, 4) Briefing Document, and 5) FAQs

### 1. Abstract of Walton, Job, Session 21, God Speech, Part 1, and Job's Response (Job 38-40:5), Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

This is a lecture by Dr. John Walton on Job chapters 38-40:5, focusing on God's first speech and Job's response. **God's speech aims to demonstrate the world's complexity**, challenging Job's and his friends' belief in a simple, justice-based system (the retribution principle). **Walton clarifies his terminology**: non-order (neutral), order (God's creation), and disorder (evil). **God showcases the order within seemingly chaotic natural phenomena**, thereby highlighting the limits of human understanding. Job ultimately acknowledges his inability to answer God, although this is only a first step in the narrative's resolution.

**2. 12 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Walton's, Job, Session 21 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Old Testament → Psalms & Wisdom → Job → Walton).**



**Walton\_Job\_Session  
n21.mp3**

### 3. Briefing Document

Okay, here's a detailed briefing document based on the provided excerpts from John Walton's Session 21 on the Book of Job:

#### **Briefing Document: John Walton on Job 38-40:5 - God's First Speech and Job's Response**

**Date:** October 26, 2023 (Date of Request) **Subject:** Analysis of God's First Speech in Job and its Implications **Source:** Excerpts from "Walton\_Job\_Session21.pdf" by John Walton

#### **I. Introduction: The Significance of Yahweh's Speech**

- **Key Moment:** The arrival of Yahweh's speech in Job chapters 38-40:5 is presented as the most critical part of the book, occurring after Job's "Oath of Innocence" and a period of suspense.
- **Storm Theophany:** God's appearance "out of the storm, the whirlwind" signals both his presence and a sense of displeasure with the current discourse.
- **No Response to Innocence:** Significantly, God *does not* directly address or validate Job's claims of innocence. This shows that Job has not "forced God's hand" into appearing. This also shows that God isn't approaching the issue from a place of justice.
- **Shift in Approach:** Instead of defending divine justice (as might be expected), God adopts a completely different tactic.

#### **II. God's Focus: The Complexity of the World**

- **Demonstrating Complexity:** God's speech aims to showcase the intricate complexity of the world, focusing on areas that humans poorly understand. He emphasizes these areas which are seemingly on the very edge of our understanding.
- **Challenging Presumptions:** This strategy directly challenges Job and his friends' premise that they understand the world's order, particularly their belief in the retribution principle.

### III. Key Concepts: Order, Non-Order, and Disorder

- **Non-Order:** Walton defines non-order as a neutral state, not inherently evil, but rather a state of things "not ordered yet." He uses the analogy of unpacked boxes during a move—potentially something useful and to-be-used, but not yet arranged to fulfill their purpose.
- *Quote:* "Non-order is neutral. It just hasn't been ordered yet."
- *Quote:* "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."
- **Order:** Order is the product of God's creative action, as in Genesis 1. God's creative process and wisdom are always working to produce order in the world.
- *Quote:* "Creation is an order-bringing process."
- *Quote:* "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."
- Walton makes note that there is still non-order in the world after the initial ordering of it in the creation stories.
- *Quote:* "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."
- **Disorder:** This is something inherently evil and acts as a threat against order. It is not neutral. It arises from evil actions.
- **Job's Misunderstanding:** Job and his friends have mistakenly assumed that all non-order (suffering, hardships) stems from disorder (evil actions), in alignment with the retribution principle.

### IV. Refutation of the Retribution Principle

- **God's Cosmic Questions:** God's questions in Job 38 about the vastness of the earth, origins of light and darkness, storehouses of snow and hail, the paths of lightning, and the sources of rain are not just showing what Job doesn't know.

- **Rain in the Desert:** God's point that he "cuts a channel for the torrents of rain... to a land where no one lives, an uninhabited desert" is a crucial example. This shows that rain does not *only* function as a reward for good behavior or punishment for bad behavior, but rather has a purpose beyond the justice system.
- *Quote:* "God makes a point; haven't you noticed that it rains where nobody lives? The rain is not operating here in a justice system."
- **Challenging the Foundation:** Through these illustrations, God disproves that justice is the single foundation on which the world operates.
- **Quote:** "In the process, he rejects the idea that justice is the foundation of the system."

## V. Job's Response and Its Limitations

- **Acknowledgement of Ignorance:** Job responds to God's speech with the statement, "I am unworthy--how can I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth." He recognizes his inability to answer God's questions.
- **Insufficient Response:** However, Walton emphasizes that this recognition of ignorance is not the final goal of the book.
- *Quote:* "The goal of the book is more than just, 'Okay, we know nothing.'"
- **Beyond Confession:** The book aims to develop a deep conviction about the nature of God's order and policies.

## VI. Preview of God's Second Speech

- **Positive Guidance:** The next section of the book will introduce a more positive perspective, moving beyond what humans do not know.
- **Behemoth and Leviathan:** This guidance will be introduced through two fascinating creatures, Behemoth and Leviathan.

## VII. Key Takeaways

- **God's Focus on Complexity:** God's speech focuses on showing the complexity of the world to refute the simple retribution theology of Job and his friends.
- **Challenging Justice as the Sole Basis:** It argues that divine justice is not the sole or primary way that the world operates.

- **More Than Admitting Ignorance:** The book seeks not merely an admission of ignorance but a deeper understanding of God's order and policies in the world.

#### **VIII. Implications for Further Study**

- This section of the book lays the foundation for understanding the rest of the book and where the author intends to go with the ideas presented here.
- The anticipation of God's second speech and the role of Behemoth and Leviathan are important for understanding the rest of the book.

This briefing document summarizes the key points from John Walton's lecture on Job 38-40:5. It highlights the major themes, arguments, and implications of God's initial speech.

## 4. Job Study Guide: Session 21, God Speech, Part 1, and Job's Response (Job 38-40:5)

### Study Guide: Job 38-40.5 - God's First Speech and Job's Response

#### Quiz

**Instructions:** Answer each question in 2-3 complete sentences.

1. What is the significance of God speaking to Job out of a storm or whirlwind?
2. Does God address Job's oath of innocence in his first speech? What does this imply?
3. What is the main point God is trying to make by demonstrating the complexity of the world?
4. Define "non-order" as it is used in this context. How is it different from "disorder?"
5. What does the example of bringing packed boxes into a new house illustrate about the concept of non-order?
6. What is the retribution principle and how does Job and his friends apply it to the world?
7. How does God's discussion of rain challenge the retribution principle?
8. What does God's use of rhetorical questions and sarcasm (according to Walton) highlight about Job's understanding of the world?
9. What is Job's response to God's first speech, and how does it reflect the impact of God's questions?
10. Why does Walton claim that Job's acknowledgment of ignorance is "not enough?" What is the ultimate goal of the book according to the lecture?

#### Quiz Answer Key

1. The storm or whirlwind is usually an accompaniment of God's presence, but it also implies God is not pleased with the current situation. It signifies a divine arrival that is meant to be a corrective.

2. No, God does not directly address Job's oath of innocence. This implies that Job did not force God's hand; God's intervention is not a response to Job's claim of innocence but an initiation from God's own will and purpose.
3. God is trying to demonstrate the complexity of the world that Job does not understand, showing that Job's understanding of order is insufficient to support his conclusion about God and Justice. God's point is to show that Job cannot claim to know how the world is ordered.
4. Non-order is a neutral state where things are not yet organized or placed with purpose; it is a state of potential, not yet shaped or used and is the beginning part of a process. Disorder, on the other hand, represents a malevolent force that actively disrupts established order.
5. Packed boxes represent the state of potential before things are arranged in an orderly manner within the new home. Like non-order in creation, they are full of potential but are not yet functional until they are arranged into something useful.
6. The retribution principle is the belief that good actions result in blessings, while evil actions result in suffering. Job and his friends believe that suffering and "non-order" in their lives stem directly from disorder and evil actions.
7. God's mention that rain falls in uninhabited deserts challenges the retribution principle because it shows that rain (which can bring prosperity and judgement) does not always operate according to a justice system; it sometimes falls indiscriminately. This suggests that the natural world's operation does not always align with what the friends expected in their view of God's justice.
8. The rhetorical questions and sarcasm highlight Job's limited knowledge and understanding of the vast complexity of the world. They demonstrate how Job's confidence in his knowledge about how the world operates is unfounded and limited.
9. Job acknowledges his unworthiness and inability to answer God by covering his mouth and stating he will say no more. He recognizes that he spoke out of ignorance and doesn't have an appropriate response to God's challenges.
10. Walton argues that simply recognizing ignorance does not offer solutions or develop conviction. The book aims to lead readers towards a deeper understanding of how the world is ordered and God's policies, going beyond the admission of human limitations.

## Essay Questions

1. Analyze the significance of Yahweh's use of rhetorical questions in Job 38. How do these questions challenge Job's previous understanding of the world and his place within it?
2. Discuss the distinction between "order," "non-order," and "disorder" as presented by Walton. How does this conceptual framework change the way one might understand suffering in the book of Job?
3. Explore the role of the retribution principle in the book of Job. How does Yahweh's speech in Job 38 challenge this principle, and what are the implications for understanding God's justice?
4. Walton argues that the book of Job's goal is to go beyond the simple acknowledgment of ignorance. Discuss what you think are the key positive lessons the book is attempting to teach about order and God's policies.
5. How does the understanding of non-order as a neutral state change your interpretation of the creation account in Genesis 1? Consider the role of humans as vice-regents in bringing order to the world in light of this definition.



## Glossary of Key Terms

**Retribution Principle:** The belief that actions, whether good or bad, directly result in corresponding blessings or punishments, often seen as a direct operation of divine justice.

**Non-Order:** A neutral state where things have not yet been organized or placed with a purpose, not inherently good or evil. It's a state of potential and the beginning part of the process of ordering.

**Order:** A state of purposeful arrangement and function where things are working as intended, often associated with wisdom and the creative acts of God.

**Disorder:** Threats against established order that are inherently evil and disruptive, seen as malevolent forces that aim to undermine the purposeful arrangement of the world.

**Yahweh:** The personal name of God used in the Old Testament, often associated with God's covenant relationship with Israel.

**Oath of Innocence:** Job's declaration of his righteousness and innocence in the face of his suffering and his request for God to explain his circumstances.

**Cosmology:** The study or understanding of the structure and order of the universe, often involving the creation and function of the cosmos.

**Ma'at:** An ancient Egyptian concept representing order, justice, truth, and cosmic balance, often associated with the pharaoh's role in maintaining harmony.

**Vice-Regents:** A person or group of people delegated to act as a ruler's representative. In this context, it refers to humans as God's partners in bringing order to the world.

## 5. FAQs on Walton, Job, Session 21, God Speech, Part 1, and Job's Response (Job 38-40:5), Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

### Frequently Asked Questions about God's Speeches in the Book of Job (Based on Walton's Analysis)

1. **Why does God speak to Job out of a storm or whirlwind?** The storm or whirlwind is a common accompaniment to God's presence in the Bible, but in this context, it also carries an inference that God is not pleased with the way things are being understood and discussed, particularly by Job and his friends. It sets the tone for God's corrective to their thinking.
2. **What is the primary focus of God's first speech to Job (Job 38-40)?** God's speech does *not* directly address Job's oath of innocence or defend God's justice. Instead, God focuses on demonstrating the immense complexity and order of the world, particularly in areas that Job and his friends might consider non-ordered or chaotic. This highlights their ignorance of how the world truly works and challenges their assumptions about the retribution principle.
3. **What is the difference between "non-order," "order," and "disorder" as explained in the lecture?**
  - **Non-order** is a neutral state of things not yet organized or functioning as they should. Think of unopened boxes in a new house. It's not inherently evil but simply lacks arrangement.
  - **Order** is when things are functioning as they are meant to in a system. God brought order to the initial non-order state in Genesis.
  - **Disorder** is a state that is inherently evil and represents a threat against established order. It is not simply the absence of order but a malicious force against it.
1. **How does God's discussion of natural phenomena (like rain and lightning) in Job 38 challenge the retribution principle?** God points out that natural phenomena, like rain, do not always operate according to a system of justice and retribution. Rain falls in uninhabited deserts, for example, demonstrating that it doesn't always serve a direct reward or punishment function. This undermines the idea that the world is governed by a simple justice-based system.

2. **What is the "retribution principle," and why does God seem to refute it in his first speech?** The retribution principle is the belief that suffering and good fortune are a direct result of one's actions; good actions are rewarded, and evil actions are punished. God's speech refutes it by showing that the world is far too complex for such a simple equation. Natural events and seemingly chaotic occurrences have an underlying order that cannot be reduced to a simple reward/punishment dynamic.
3. **What is the significance of Job's response in Job 40:3-5 ("I am unworthy...I put my hand over my mouth") after God's first speech?** Job acknowledges his ignorance and inability to answer God's questions, thus accepting the fact that he does not have the knowledge to question God's policies. However, this confession is not enough to fully resolve the issues in the book. The book doesn't just want to leave the reader with the conclusion that 'we know nothing', but go further.
4. **According to the lecture, is it appropriate to view God as being sarcastic in his speech to Job?** While the tone of God's questions in Job 38 is often interpreted as sarcastic, this is a literary technique to emphasize Job's limited perspective. The lecture suggests that this sarcasm is a literary device and is not how God actually speaks. God's purpose is not to be sarcastic, but to make a point about Job's limited understanding.
5. **What is the purpose of the Book of Job, beyond acknowledging our ignorance, and how will this be addressed later in the story?** The goal of the book is not simply to show that we are ignorant of how the world works, but to develop a conviction about how to think about the way the world is ordered and God's policies. This will be further developed in God's second speech through the discussion of the creatures Behemoth and Leviathan. These creatures represent further examples of God's power, wisdom, and design that fall outside of the constraints of the retribution principle.