

The Book of Job

Session 22: God's Speech 2, Behemoth and Leviathan and Job's Response (Job 40.6–41.34)

Author: Dr. John Walton

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Abstract

In this session, Dr. John Walton explores Yahweh's second speech and Job's final response in Job 40:6–41:34, moving beyond human ignorance to explain how believers should think about God. He proposes that Behemoth and Leviathan are not literal or extinct animals but rather literary representations of chaos creatures, who embody non-moral, continuing non-order within God's sovereign creation. Through these illustrations, the text compares Behemoth's stability and trust in a raging river to how Job should respond to trials, while showcasing that just as Job cannot tame or domesticate Leviathan, he cannot control or manipulate Yahweh. Ultimately, Job understands this corrective, retracts his presumptuous claims, ends his mourning, and submits to God's transcendent wisdom.

Outline

I. Introduction to God's Speech 2

- **A. The Divine Speaker:** Yahweh speaks again from the storm or whirlwind.
 - Emphasizes that Yahweh, not Elohim, Shaddai, or Adonai, is the speaker, providing an Israelite feel that matches the prologue.
 - Serves as a direct Israelite clarification to Job's references to El Shaddai.
- **B. God Questions, Job Listens:** The shifting dynamic of questioning.
 - Job has been the one asking questions, making demands, and complaining of God's silence.
 - God orders Job to 'brace yourself like a man' for questioning, reversing their roles completely.
 - Job's previous questions are swept aside, and he has already placed his hand over his mouth.

II. Identity of Behemoth and Leviathan

- **A. Beyond Zoology:** They are not known natural or extinct biological species.
 - Their descriptions simply do not match any known physical animals.
 - The detail of Leviathan breathing fire is a non-biological feature that rules out standard species.

- **B. The Category of Chaos Creatures:** They represent chaos creatures.
 - A well-known category of fearsome or liminal beasts in the ancient Near East, highly familiar to the ancient audience.
 - These are liminal creatures existing on the periphery of the ordered world.
 - While they share abstract characteristics with known animals (e.g., hippopotamus for Behemoth, crocodile for Leviathan), the known animals are merely their 'spawn' or 'minions' rather than the creatures themselves.
 - They are often composite, fearsome beasts of the imagination, combining different animal parts.

III. Characteristics and Role of Chaos Creatures

- **A. Divine Origin:** They are created by God.
 - Mentioned as part of God's creation in Genesis 1:21 and Psalm 104 (where God made Leviathan to 'sport with').
 - In Genesis 1:21, the verb 'bara' (create) is specifically attached to sea monsters to show they are part of the ordered system.
- **B. Non-Moral Function:** They are agents of non-order, not moral evil.
 - They represent the potential for continuing non-order, like thorns and thistles in the less-ordered realm outside Eden.
 - They are not morally evil, but they can do serious harm and wreak havoc among humans simply because they operate by mindless instinct.
 - Comparable to a tornado—not morally evil, yet highly destructive.
 - They are not enemies of God; rather, they are under His ultimate control, with boundaries set, though they remain undomesticated by humans.
- **C. Ultimate Power:** They represent the peaks of animal power.
 - Behemoth represents the most potent land animal imaginable (plural of cattle, an abstraction).
 - Leviathan represents the most potent sea creature imaginable.

IV. Chaos Creatures as Literary Characters in Job

- **A. Function Over Identity:** Their literary role in the book is primary.
 - Understanding the authoritative message of the book requires looking beyond debates about physical identity to see how they function as literary characters.
- **B. Intertextual Connections:** Previous references to chaos creatures in the book:
 - Job's lament (Job 3:8) spoke of those ready to rouse Leviathan.
 - Job's first response to Eliphaz (Job 7:12) asked why God treats him as a chaos creature ('tannim') kept under guard on a leash.
 - Job's accusation (Job 30:15-23) that God Himself was acting like a chaos creature toward him.

- **C. Reversing the Accusation:** The corrective focus of God's speeches:
 - God does not act like a chaos creature, nor is He treating Job as one; instead, God tells Job to be like Behemoth, while showcasing that He is far superior to Leviathan.

V. Behemoth and Job Compared

- **A. Shared Creative Ground:** God groups Job and Behemoth together as His creations.
 - God directs Job's attention: 'Look at Behemoth, which I made along with you' (Job 40:15).
- **B. Structural Similarities:** Parallels in experience and power (Job 40:15-22):
 - Content and well-fed (v. 15), as Job once was.
 - Strong (vv. 16-18), as God made Job.
 - Ranks first among its kind (v. 19), matching Job's high status.
 - Cared for (v. 20) and sheltered (vv. 21-22), as Job was.
- **C. Call to Stability:** The moral lesson of Behemoth (Job 40:23-24):
 - Behemoth is not alarmed by a raging, surging river; the implication is that Job should likewise trust and remain secure.
 - Behemoth cannot be captured or trapped; Job should show similar resilience and invulnerability to being trapped by anger.
 - Job should learn to be 'a little more like a chaos creature' in terms of security and untamable integrity.

VI. Yahweh and Leviathan Compared

- **A. The Second-Person Challenge:** Job's inability to control Leviathan (Job 41:1-8).
 - Uses second-person questions ('Can you pull it with a fish hook?', 'Will it make an agreement with you?', 'Can you make a pet of it?') to emphasize Job's limits.
 - The logical lesson: If Job cannot domesticate, tame, or trap Leviathan (an inferior creature), why would he expect to domesticate, trap, or make an agreement with Yahweh?
- **B. Attributes of Sovereignty:** Shared attributes of wildness and invulnerability (Job 41:10-34):
 - No one is fierce enough to rouse Leviathan; likewise, who can stand against Yahweh?
 - No one has a claim against Leviathan, and none has a claim against Yahweh.
 - Leviathan cannot be forced to receive a bridle, just as Job cannot bridle or control Yahweh's actions.
 - Leviathan dominates all who are proud and rules as king over them; Job has failed to humble the proud, but God rules sovereignly over them.
- **C. Misconceptions Cleared:** What the text does not say:
 - This section never discusses God defeating or subduing Leviathan; it is not about God bringing order by subduing chaos.

- The book does not claim that God brings justice to the cosmos or to human experience; that was the false assumption of the retribution principle.
- It shows that Yahweh cannot be domesticated or forced into a transactional system.

VII. Job's Response: Recantation and Submission

- **A. Recognizing Limits:** Job acknowledges God's unthwartable purposes (Job 42:2).
 - Aduces that he spoke of things he did not understand, things 'too wonderful' ('pele'—divine information beyond human understanding) for him to know.
 - Realizes he was presumptuous in trying to reduce God's plans to the retribution principle.
- **B. True Meaning of the Hebrew:** Redefining Job's 'Repentance' (Job 42:6):
 - Distinguished from 'shuv' (behavioral change); uses the Niphal form which indicates regret and a retraction of previous statements (similar to when God changes His mind in Exodus 32:14).
 - The use of the preposition 'al' (concerning/upon) indicates that Job reconsiders and puts 'dust and ashes' (his mourning) out of his mind.
 - Job announces the end to his mourning, accepts his reality, recants his arrogant challenges, and submits to Yahweh.