

The Book of Job

Session 25: The World in the Book of Job: Order, Non-order, and Disorder

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Abstract

In this session, Dr. John Walton explores the theological and practical significance of how the cosmos is constructed, utilizing the distinct concepts of order, non-order, and disorder. He argues that the Book of Job soundly refutes the retribution principle by showing that the natural world operates in accordance with God's sovereign wisdom rather than His personal attributes like justice. Rather than micromanaging individual experiences or natural disasters, God has established a complex system that functions under His wisely-designed laws. Ultimately, believers are called to abandon the idea that justice is the sole linchpin of the universe and instead trust in God's unfathomable wisdom when encountering unexplained suffering.

Outline

I. Introduction

- A. Focus on how we think about the world and God's operations within it.
- B. Reintroducing and examining the three categories: order, non-order, and disorder.
- C. Understanding the significance of these categories for both the Book of Job and personal theology.

II. Creation: Order, Non-order, and Disorder

A. The Nature of Creation

1. Creation is primarily an act of ordering the cosmos and assigning roles and functions.
2. Goes far beyond material origins; everything is brought under God's control to serve His purposes.

B. Genesis 1 and Non-order

1. Verse 2 describes a primordial, non-ordered situation with raw materials waiting to be assigned a function.

2. Non-order is illustrated as unpacked boxes or unarranged rooms; it is not evil, just incomplete.
3. God chose by design not to achieve a state of total, static order in His initial work.
4. The sea remains a place of non-order, and the realm outside Eden featured less order than the Garden.

C. Human Partnership in Ordering

1. Humans were created in God's image as vice-regents to work alongside Him in the ongoing process of ordering.
2. God deliberately chose to utilize an extended process and bring people into partnership rather than finalizing everything immediately.

D. The Entry of Disorder (Genesis 3)

1. Disorder represents that which is evil and is largely introduced into the world by human rebellion.
2. We live in a complex world characterized simultaneously by established order, continuing non-order, and intrusive disorder.
3. The world around us is not fully endowed with or reflective of God's personal attributes.

III. The Retribution Principle Fallacy

A. The Error of Job and His Friends

1. They adopted the retribution principle as the absolute foundation of the cosmos.
2. Believed that God's justice was directly infused into the natural world and that the world operated in strict accordance with His character.
3. The Book of Job corrects this by showing the world does not operate in this simplistic way.
4. Because it is a fallen, incomplete world containing non-order and disorder, its regular operations do not directly reflect God's personal character.

IV. Wisdom and Non-order (Natural Disasters)

A. God's Gradualist Design

1. God's wisdom chose to introduce and expand order gradually rather than instantaneously.
2. He set up a realm where non-order remains and disorder was allowed to intrude.
3. Rains and floods do not automatically reflect His active justice or localized blessing and punishment.

B. Defining Natural Disasters as Non-order

1. Hurricanes, tsunamis, earthquakes, tornadoes, droughts, famines, epidemics, and biological mutations are aspects of non-order.

2. They are not morally evil or malicious, though they have severely negative impacts on humans.
3. They are subject to God's ultimate bidding, yet they cannot be assumed to be instruments wielded in judgment every time they occur.
4. Some natural disasters serve positive purposes in the wider ecosystem, showing how God uses non-order to achieve ordered objectives.

C. The Absence of Divine Micromanagement

1. God does not hold a remote control device to decide which specific house gets hit by a tornado and which is spared.
2. Natural forces are biddable and subject to God's control, but they do not operate mechanically or with individual moral discrimination.

V. Understanding God's Control and Wisdom

A. Individual Experiences vs. Cosmic System

1. We do not ask why gravity works in a specific situation, nor why it rains in one place and not another.
2. Likewise, we should not demand explanations for why a bone breaks, or why one person gets diabetes or cancer while another is spared.

B. Where Wisdom is Found

1. God's wisdom is found in the overarching way He chose to design and create the system of the world.
2. Wisdom is not found in each individual expression of gravity or cell division.
3. God's control is connected to the grand cosmic system rather than being tailored to our immediate personal experiences or moral conduct.

VI. Justice is Not the Linchpin of the Cosmos

A. The Limits of Justice in Design

1. While humans ask why God designed the world this way, the Book of Job makes it clear He did not do it for the sake of justice.
2. Justice is not the linchpin, core, or organizing principle of the cosmos.
3. The natural forces built into the world are not moral, volitional, or discerning.

B. The Necessity of Non-Justice Systems

1. If absolute justice were the core of everything in our fallen world, humanity would not exist.
2. God is capable of interfering or micromanaging should He choose to, but this is not His typical way of running the world.
3. In its fallen state, the world operates by His complex wisdom, and we cannot reduce or assess everything through the lens of His justice.

C. Conclusion: The True Message of the Book

- 1.** The Book of Job reshapes our expectations, showing that the world does not operate the way we think it does or should.
- 2.** Rather than seeking a mechanical explanation of cause or accusing God of injustice, we must trust in His sovereign wisdom.