

Dr. John Walton, Job, Session 21,

6-min. Video Overview

BiblicalLearning.org by Ted Hildebrandt

Welcome to this explainer. Today, we are diving into an absolutely fascinating analysis by Dr. John Walden. We're looking at that huge, long-awaited moment in the book of Job, specifically chapters 38 through 40.

Up to this point, Job has just poured out his heart. He's been demanding an explanation for his immense, totally unearned suffering. The tension has been building and building, and his oath of innocence is just hanging there, heavy in the air.

So, let's dive into this by putting ourselves directly in Job's shoes for a second. Imagine you've passionately demanded an explanation for your suffering. You've asked for a literal courtroom trial with the creator of the universe to clear your name.

And then, the sky darkens. The wind howls. He actually shows up.

What would you expect him to say? You'd probably expect a direct verdict, right? A point-by-point breakdown of your life choices. Well, the text tells us the Lord spoke to Job out of the storm, or the whirlwind. Now, this dramatic arrival is just incredible.

In the ancient world, a whirlwind is a classic sign of God's immense power. But Dr. Walden points out something else. It strongly implies that God is not particularly happy with the assumptions everyone has been making.

He's arriving to drop a massive corrective on their entire way of thinking. And here is the huge plot twist. Job wanted a courtroom trial, right? He wanted to talk strictly about justice.

But look at the reality here. God completely sidesteps the topic. He doesn't respond to Job's oath of innocence at all, and he doesn't even defend his own justice.

Which is just wild, considering everyone else in the book has built their entire worldview on this strict concept of justice. Instead, God launches into this breathtaking demonstration of the sheer complexity of the cosmos. Which brings us to section one, redefining the cosmos.

We'll be looking at order, non-order, and disorder. To really get why God changes the subject so drastically, we have to step back and look at Dr. Walden's vocabulary for how the ancient world actually viewed the universe. Let's start with order.

In the ancient mindset, order isn't just neatness. It is an optimal state where things function purposefully. If you look back at the creation account in Genesis, God's creative acts are fundamentally an order-bringing process.

He's taking what is unformed and purposefully placing things so they function exactly as they need to within an optimal system. It's all about function and purpose. Then we have non-order.

And this is where people often get tripped up. Non-order is not chaos. It's not evil.

The absolutely crucial point here is that non-order is completely neutral. It just means things haven't been ordered yet. In the ancient view, God didn't eliminate all non-order at creation.

Things like the sea or the untamed wilderness- those were seen as non-ordered spaces. And what's amazing, and a huge takeaway for us, is that humans were actually made in the image of God to act as his partners to help bring order to this neutral non-order. Finally, we have disorder.

Now, disorder is entirely different from non-order. Disorder is inherently evil. These are the intentional active threats against order.

It's a rebellion that purposefully threatens the functioning ordered systems of the world. So we actually live in a world made up of all three. God's optimal order, neutral non-order, and evil disorder.

Now, I know these ancient concepts can feel a bit abstract at first glance. But Dr. Walton brilliantly grounds this by comparing the cosmos to something we all absolutely dread – moving into a new house. Think about moving into a new place.

Picture all your packed boxes just sitting there in the middle of the living room. Nothing is purposefully placed, you can't find your coffee mug, and you definitely can't find your toothbrush. The room just isn't functioning.

Well, those boxes represent neutral non-order. They aren't evil, even if the packing process felt like it; they just aren't organized yet. But the process of unpacking those boxes and putting things in their proper cabinets- that is the creation of order.

And when you finally have a purposeful, functional home where everything works the way it should, boom, that is order. Moving right along to section 2, debunking the retribution principle. See, Job and his friends made a really massive mistake.

They took the unimaginably complex operations of the universe and boiled them down to a single, simple rule called the retribution principle. Basically, they assumed that all suffering, all the chaos of non-order, must come directly from evil actions. They literally thought human justice was the single engine driving the entire cosmos.

So, to dismantle this, God takes Job on a virtual tour of the universe. He asks him about the storehouses of snow and the paths of lightning, and then he asks this striking question. Who cuts a channel for the torrents of rain to a land where no one lives, an uninhabited desert? It is a brilliant bit of divine sarcasm exposing Job's sheer ignorance of how the world actually works.

Under that retribution principle, rain is just a tool for human justice, right? Floods to judge the bad guys, crops to prosper the good guys. But God shatters this incredibly human-centric view by pointing out that rain falls perfectly well in the uninhabited desert, where literally no one lives. God forcefully rejects the idea that human justice drives the cosmic system.

The rain is watering a desert to bring forth grass in a place totally detached from human morality. The world is vastly more complex than just some simple moral vending machine. Which leads us into our final section, section 3: ignorance is not enough.

Faced with this overwhelming display of cosmic complexity, God completely dismantles the retribution principle. He shows there is order, even in what humans perceive as non-order. And Job? Job is entirely humbled.

He says, I am unworthy? How can I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth. I spoke once, but I have no answer. Job finally realizes his total inability to formulate a simple equation for how the world works.

He recognizes he just isn't knowledgeable enough about the cosmos to demand answers from the creator. So he chooses instead to cover his mouth and fall completely silent. Now it seems like a fitting end, doesn't it? Job is humbled.

God is big. End of story. But here is the absolutely critical takeaway we want to leave you with today.

Simply confessing that we know nothing is the finish line of this book. Yes, Job acknowledges his ignorance, but confessed ignorance doesn't give us a framework for how to think about God's policies or how to live in a world that is filled with non-order. It's a huge cliffhanger.

It leaves us wondering, if justice isn't the single organizing principle of the universe, what on earth is? What positive convictions is God going to reveal next when he begins his second speech and introduces those mysterious beasts, Behemoth and Leviathan? You really have to ask yourself: are you comfortable living in a universe that is just way too complex for your own formulas?