

Dr. John Walton, Job, Session 22, 6-min. Video Overview

BiblicalLearning.org by Ted Hildebrandt

Alright, let's jump right in. Today, we're diving into what is honestly one of the most confusing yet absolutely crucial parts of the book of Job. In this explainer, we're talking about God's second speech from the storm.

Specifically, we're going to unpack what scholar John Walton reveals about chapters 40 and 41, because let me tell you, his research completely radically shifts how we understand God, cosmic justice, and the untamable chaos of the world. I mean, for centuries, readers have just thrown their hands up in the air over this. You've got Job, right? He's agonizing, he's crying out for a cosmic courtroom trial, and God answers him with a bizarre, sprawling speech about a couple of giant beasts, including a literal fire-breathing sea monster.

What? It feels totally disconnected. People usually either skip right over this part, or they get hopelessly bogged down trying to figure out what kind of animals these are. But Walton argues that we really can't ignore this, because this section actually contains the core authoritative message of the entire book.

It's meant to completely reorient our thinking. So, to really get what's happening, we have to look at the setup. Job had been demanding answers.

He's questioning God's justice, frustrated by the silence. But then, Yahweh steps in and just turns the tables entirely. He tells Job, brace yourself.

God isn't showing up to answer Job's questions; he's showing up to question Job. He basically challenges Job to try being God for a single day. Unleash your wrath, humble the proud, crush the wicked, go ahead, try it.

He's rhetorically challenging Job's ability to impose cosmic justice, essentially saying, do you really think you have this incredibly complex universe all figured out? Now, to grasp the real meaning here, we first have to shatter a massive myth. We have to look way past the common idea that behemoth and leviathan are just normal biological species. When people try to box behemoth in as a hippo or leviathan as a crocodile, the features just do not line up.

I mean, the most glaring example: Leviathan breathes fire. There is literally no known biological or extinct animal that breathes fire. So if we treat this like a strict zoology lesson, we are completely missing the point of the text.

Okay, so if they aren't dinosaurs or oversized zoo animals, what on earth are they? Well, according to John Walton, ancient audiences wouldn't have been pulling out a biology textbook. They would have instantly recognized these beasts as chaos creatures. This was a super well-known literary category in the ancient Near East.

Imagine these liminal beings that exist way out on the fringes, the absolute periphery of the civilized, ordered world. They are quintessential, almost abstract figures that embody the

very idea of non-order and the untamed wild. Now, here is where it gets really fascinating, especially within the biblical worldview.

In a lot of other ancient myths, chaos monsters are these evil rival gods that have to be defeated. But the biblical text, like what we see in Genesis 1 and Psalm 104, insists that these creatures were actually created by God. They're a deliberate part of his partially ordered world.

They aren't morally evil. They just operate purely on mindless instinct. But because they are so massive and incredibly wild, they can cause serious harm. Even though they wreak havoc, they are fully under God's control.

If the whole chaos creature concept still feels a little too abstract, Walton gives us this brilliant analogy that brings it right into our modern day. Think of a chaos creature like a tornado. A tornado isn't morally evil, right? It doesn't have some sinister plot or a personal vendetta against your town.

It operates strictly on the laws of nature and instinct. But it causes massive destruction simply because it's doing what tornadoes do. Chaos creatures are basically the ancient equivalent of these wild, untamable, non-moral forces of nature.

They aren't enemies of God, but they are incredibly dangerous to us. So, the crucial takeaway here is that we must look beyond biological identity. We have to analyze Behemoth and Leviathan for their literary role.

The author of Job is using them as characters, specifically designed to challenge how Job thinks. Actually, if you remember from earlier in the book, Job complained that God was treating him like a chaos creature, keeping him guarded, putting him on a leash. So, what does God do? He brings these exact creatures right onto the main stage to respond to that accusation.

But in a way, Job totally didn't see coming. Let's look closely at how God introduces Behemoth in chapter 40. He says to Job, look at Behemoth, which I made along with you.

Did you catch that? He intentionally groups them together. Throughout the passage, God talks about how Behemoth was created strong, cared for, and sheltered, which is exactly how Job's life used to be. But the real turning point is verse 23.

God points out that when the raging river surges against Behemoth, the beast doesn't panic. He is completely secure. The implication for Job is unmistakable.

You, Job, are facing the raging waters of suffering right now. Instead of panicking and throwing accusations at God, you need to stand secure and trust in the surging waters, just like Behemoth. Then, God shifts his focus over to the great sea monster, Leviathan.

And here, the grammar suddenly changes. God starts firing these second-person questions right at Job. Can you pull in Leviathan with a fishhook? Can you put a cord through its nose? Will it beg you for mercy? Can you make a pet out of it? Obviously, the answer is a resounding no.

But there's a much deeper layer at play. You see, Job has been trying to trap God in an argument, to pin down his plans, to demand that God act according to human rules. God is highlighting how utterly absurd that is.

I mean, if Job can't even put a leash on Leviathan, why on earth does he think he can put a leash on the creator of the universe? And this brilliantly illustrates the core lesson of the second speech. A lot of people mistakenly think God is just showing off here by defeating or slaying Leviathan. But Walton points out something huge.

The text never actually says God subdues Leviathan in this passage. Instead, God is using Leviathan as a direct point of comparison. Leviathan cannot be controlled, won't submit, and is absolutely impossible to domesticate.

While Yahweh, who is infinitely greater than Leviathan, is exactly the same way. Neither the chaos creature nor the creator can be tamed, harnessed, or forced into a neat little box for human purposes. This realization completely blows up the theology that Job and his friends had been arguing about for the entire book.

They fully believed in the retribution principle, this strict mechanical system where God constantly imposes immediate justice. You know, good things always happen to good people, and bad things instantly crush the bad guys. But the very existence of these wild, untamed chaos creatures proves that the cosmos just isn't a neatly domesticated, fully predictable system.

God doesn't claim to bring mechanical justice to every single human experience at all times. The world has wild, untamable elements, and God is the king over all of it, even the parts that seem utterly chaotic to us. When this massive paradigm shift finally hits Job in chapter 42, his response is just full of profound awe.

He admits that he tried to obscure God's plans by insisting that God had to operate according to strict human logic. Job uses this great Hebrew word *Pele* to describe God's workings. *Pele* refers to things that belong entirely to the divine realm, things that are just way beyond our human pay grade.

Job finally realizes he was demanding a full explanation for a universe he has no capacity to run, from a God he has absolutely no power to tame. Notice the really beautiful progression in Job's final response here. Earlier in the book, Job just put his hand over his mouth and stopped talking.

But now? He actively retracts his words. He repents. But, and Walton clarifies this beautifully, he isn't repenting of some hidden moral sin that caused his suffering.

He's expressing deep regret for his arrogant, presumptuous challenges against God. And incredibly, the Hebrew phrasing actually suggests that when he mentions dust and ashes, he's deciding to put the dust and ashes out of his mind. He officially ends his mourning.

He completely accepts his reality, even without ever getting the specific answers to why he suffered in the first place. The ultimate takeaway of this explainer is a profound challenge to

how we view our own relationship with the divine. Behemoth and Leviathan are here to teach us that we live in a partially ordered world, and it contains wild, chaotic forces.

In the face of that reality, we have to learn to trust God without trying to domesticate him. We literally cannot demand that God act as our personal, cosmic vending machine of justice, and we can't force him to explain every wild storm that hits our lives. True wisdom is finding stability in the surging waters, resting in the knowledge that the untamable God is ultimately the one in control.

So as we wrap things up today, I want to leave you with a provocative thought about your own posture toward the untamable chaos of life. When suffering or confusion hits you out of nowhere, are you exhausting yourself trying to put a hook in the nose of the Almighty, demanding that he operate strictly on your terms? Or will you look at Behemoth, look at Leviathan, and choose to stand secure and trust this deeply mysterious, wonderfully untamable creator, even when the river is raging around you? Something to think about. Thanks for joining me as we unpack this.