

## Job

### Session 23: Epilogue, Job 42

By John Walton

This is Dr. John Walton and his teaching on the Book of Job. This is session 23, Epilogue Job 42.

#### Introduction to the Epilogue [00:23-2:04]

So, we've finally reached the epilogue, the prose portion that ends the book. It starts in 42:7. All the speeches are over, in a sense. So, we're now tying up some loose ends. But it's precisely these loose ends that have caused confusion for a lot of people. It's easy to look at the epilogue as giving the concluding message of the book, but it's not. It's only tying up a loose end. Let's take a look at it.

In verses seven through nine, we have the reprimand and reconciliation of Job's friends. God said to Eliphaz, apparently the spokesperson for the group, "I am angry with you and your two friends because you have not spoken the truth about me, as my servant Job has. So now take seven bulls and seven rams and go to my servant Job and sacrifice a burnt offering for yourselves. My servant Job will pray for you, and I will accept his prayer and not deal with you according to your folly. You have not spoken the truth about me as my servant Job has."

Now notice, first of all, that it's the three friends, not Elihu. Elihu is not included in this reprimand. That's not because he was a later addition to the book. It's rather because he spoke right about God. And so, he's not included in this reprimand.

#### Translation issue: "Truth to me as..." not "about me" 2:04-3:18]

But we've got a translation difficulty here, by now, that's no surprise in the Book of Job. The NIV talks about speaking "the truth about me." And I just used that language because that's what the translation has. The word "truth" is the word *nekonah*. *Nekonah* in Hebrew indicates that something is logical, sensible, and verifiable. So, it's that kind of treatment of the idea of truth as logical, sensible, and verifiable. But what we

have to notice is the combination of this verb and the preposition that comes after it. The NIV translated that preposition "about." So "you have spoken about me." The problem is that the combination of this verb and preposition consistently throughout the Old Testament means "to speak to someone who is generally present." It's not speaking "about them." It's speaking "to them."

### **Divine Approval not for the Dialogues but for the Epilogue Statements [3:18-5:17]**

Now that creates some problems. We can see why translators have gone in a different direction because how does that make sense here? First of all, it refers to what Job has spoken to God in his previous speech, verses one through six of chapter 42. That is now; Job has spoken that which is right. He's spoken to God. That's important because it makes it clear that not everything Job has said throughout the book has been right or true, or *nekonah*. Job's been wrong about a lot of things that he said. So this helps because it's only what Job has just spoken to Yahweh that has been given approval, and that's in contrast to the things he spoke throughout the book. So, God has not declared that everything Job said is right. He has rather given approval to Job's response and chastised the friends. They're compared and chastised for not being comparably penitent. It's not that the friends spoke what was wrong to God. They didn't speak to God at all. Okay? So, this isn't about all of the dialogues, "you have not spoken what is right to me," God says to Eliphaz, "as my servant Job has." They've remained silent and not given a penitent response as Job has. This is an important statement because it focuses this comment just on this last part of the book.

### **Rhetorical Strategy of the Epilogue: Not reinstatement of the Retribution Principle [5:17-8:22]**

Now, the rhetorical strategy of the epilogue, what's it doing? People have considered it problematic to think of this as a legitimate conclusion to the book. It raises real problems for people; after all, restoring Job's prosperity doesn't erase the suffering that he experienced. The solution kind of rings hollow. If this is the answer, God gives it

back. That has a hollow feel to it. Providing Job with more children does not heal his grief for the children that he lost.

At this point, let me remind you that I've suggested the book is a thought experiment. That doesn't mean that we have to imagine a real Job grieving over the children that God has taken away. This is all in the thought experiment frame. Restoring God's prosperity, I'm sorry, restoring Job's prosperity seems like a reinstallation of the retribution principle. Why does that make sense? It seems that God has been trying to establish the inadequacy of the retribution principle. So why bring it back in? These are some of the problems that people have had with the book. So, let's think about it. Recall that the focus of the book is God's policies. The Challenger had claimed that it's poor policy for righteous people to suffer, I'm sorry, to prosper. Job claims that it's a poor policy for righteous people to suffer. The first 27 chapters explore the Challenger's claims, throughout which Job maintains his belief that righteousness, not prosperity, matters most. Job demonstrates that it's possible to be righteous for righteousness' sake. He, indeed, will serve God for nothing. The book likewise addresses Job's claim and concludes that it is not God's policy to prosper righteous people. Invariably that's not God's policy. By restoring Job's prosperity in the epilogue, God makes a clear statement that he will continue to act as he did before, and the policy's unchanged. The challenges to his policies have bounced off. And so, he restores his policies unchanged. The cases presented by the Challenger and by Job have proven untenable. God is not bound by the retribution principle.

### **Prosperity as a Gift [8:22-9:08]**

Job can now think about his prosperity differently. Not as something that he deserves by virtue of the retribution principle, which is the foundation of how the world works. He has to think differently. Prosperity is not a reward he has earned or a reward that God is obliged to give. Whatever prosperity he experiences is a gift from God, plain and simple. The restoration of Job's prosperity is not intended to erase his pain. It's not

even primarily for Job's benefit. That's not the point of the restoration. Remember, this is not about Job; it's about God. Through Job's renewed prosperity, God's challenged policies are reinstated. The prosperity of the righteous is not a given. It's not mechanical. It's not the foundation on which the cosmos is ordered. It is not the obligation of God, but it is the pleasure of God. The epilogue does not suggest that when we suffer, we may console ourselves with an expectation of future satisfaction--someday, we'll get it all back. That's certainly not the lesson of the book.

Our purpose is not to learn from Job as a character or to learn from his experiences. The book does not ask us to put ourselves in his place; that comes easily enough for some of us. It does not ask us to model our responses after his behavior. We are not supposed to be like Job. Instead, the book prompts us to learn how to think about God more accurately, just as Job learns alongside us, how to think about God more accurately. God delights in showing favor to those who are faithful to him. But the world is not bound to operate on that premise.

### **Restoration of Job's Prosperity and the Triangle: Wisdom, not Justice [9:08-14:39]**

The restoration of Job's prosperity does not equate to an unqualified reinstallation of the retribution principle. Job's blessings must now be considered in a different light. Neither God's policies nor the world's operations are founded on the retribution principle applied as theodicy.

So, where does God fit on the triangle? Remember, we've talked about this triangle with the retribution principle and Job's righteousness and God's justice and where everybody located themselves and where they built their fort, and what they were willing to give up.

So, where does God fit on the triangle? He doesn't. God rejects the triangle. God crumbles it up and throws it away. God doesn't buy the triangle idea. That was the human attempt to try to understand the ordering of the cosmos. That was their simple equations that didn't work. That's why even Elihu was wrong; he still thought justice was the foundation. He still tried to fit into the triangle, even though he kind of stretched it and

worked at the surface purposes. God doesn't fit on the triangle. The triangle is rejected. We don't have a triangle of claims. The basis is not justice. The basis is wisdom.

When events appear to occur, according to the retribution principle, they should be viewed as simply the ripple effects of God's character as he engages to bring blessing and judgment in his wisdom. It does not offer us an explanation of why righteous people suffer. We should not base our expectations on Job's experiences. Job receives no explanation for his suffering, and the book does not fill that void for readers as if we should be given an explanation. The only explanation the book offers is concerning right thinking about God and his policies in a world where suffering is pervasive and inevitable. That's what it concerns.

The epilogue, then, is the perfect conclusion to the book. Challenges to God's policies have been addressed. Various misconceptions about God and the cosmos have been dispelled. We have gained wisdom. This wisdom does not ease our suffering, but it does help us to avoid foolish thinking that might lead us to reject God when we actually need him most. So, the epilogue is a conclusion to the book, but it does not embody the message of the book. The message of the book came out of God's speeches.

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