

The Book of Job
Session 24: Job in the Book of Job
By John Walton

This is Dr. John Walton and his teaching on the Book of Job. This is session 24, Job in the Book of Job.

Introduction [00:21-00:45]

Now we're going to spend a couple of segments taking a sort of summary look at some of the characters in the Book of Job. Now, first of all, of course, we're going to take a look at Job, and then we're going to look at the world and how the world is understood in the Book of Job. And then, finally, we'll take a look at God in the Book of Job. So those are some of the segments coming up.

Job's Role in the Book [00:45-2:00]

So, let's take a look at Job and try to summarize his role in the book and in the message of the book. Job's role is to pose the problem of the book. His role is not to give the answer that the book has to offer. His viewpoints represent yet one more wrong way to respond to suffering. He also illustrates inadequate wisdom. He's commended, not for how he responds to suffering, but for the quality and motivation of his righteousness and for his eventual recanting. His ideas about why he suffers, God is unjust, and his prescription for the remedy to his pain is to confront God. They're both incorrect. So, we have to be careful that we don't come to the Book of Job expecting to take our lead from him.

Job's Righteousness [2:00-3:03]

Now, his righteousness, it's a righteousness that distinguishes someone from the world around them. That's Job 31, when Job gives his oath of innocence, he's sort of describing how he understands his righteousness. So, it's not absolute righteousness, as in God's eyes, no one is righteous as the Psalms tell us. But this kind of righteousness distinguishes you from the world. It really stands in the book as a contrast to benefits.

That's the point that Job is interested in, his righteousness and not the benefits. He defends righteousness very strongly. Is Job ultimately interested in what he stands to gain by his

righteous behavior, or alternatively, is his righteous behavior having independent value regardless of the benefits? And, of course, that's how he goes.

Why is Job Righteous? [3:03-3:45]

If his righteousness is not motivated by potential gain, then what motivates him? Why is Job righteous? The text doesn't really say because it is mostly interested in establishing whether the benefit is the motivator or not. If the benefit is not the motivator, it has made its point.

Job is not claiming to be perfect. The book doesn't identify him as perfect. He only wants to be declared innocent of the sort of offenses that would have caused his dramatic downfall. That's Job's interest in his righteousness.

Job's Piety – Petty? [3:45-7:45]

Let's turn back to his interest in piety. We've talked about this before, as early as our treatment of verses four and five in chapter one. I'm using the word “piety” as a way to talk about ritual performance because that's how it was thought of in the ancient world. Remember, it's associated with the great symbiosis--pampered gods. So, piety is those ritual actions that work in the great symbiosis system to pamper the gods. Piety of that sort was insurance against the fragile egos of the gods and against their volatility. Piety, in this sense, is not mutually exclusive to righteousness but was all that was essential for remaining in good standing with the gods in most of the ancient world. All you needed was this ritual performance. Throughout the book, piety was never proposed as the needed response to remedy Job's situation, even by his friends. They never suggest that ritual performance will solve his problem.

But the great symbiosis is the presumed motivation for his righteousness and his piety. That is, he's doing it for the benefits that he gains. Piety is not presented as part of the problem or as part of the solution. It's strangely absent from the conversation. That, again, draws our attention to its prominence in Job chapter one, verses four and five. Job offers sacrifices on behalf of his children in case they might have committed some serious, yet inadvertent, offense. It shows that Job is ritually conscientious to a fault. Although the book is not concerned with whether he is sufficiently pious or not, and again, as we talked about before, I think it conveys

instead a potential vulnerability.

As the book unfolds, Job repeatedly tries to engage a mediator, an advocate to confront God in court. He apparently has concluded that God must be petty, visiting righteousness with the visiting the righteous, I'm sorry, with intense suffering and misfortune on a technicality. Job's richly conscientious custom provides the bridge to the scene in heaven. It's possible that the Challenger's suggestion is even built on the potential implications of Job's ritual piety. If Job harbors a suspicion that God is inclined to be petty, so much so that he engages in these fastidious rituals based on such meager possibilities, then it might infer that Job is motivated not only in his piety but in his righteousness also by fear of being the target of an attack by an unreasonable and capricious deity.

If Job is motivated to piety because he believes God to be petty, is it not also possible that Job is motivated to righteousness because he believes God's favors are on auction. The Challenger then has good reason to believe that Job may well be acting within the confines of the great symbiosis and therefore is justified in raising the issue before God. The suggestion of the Challenger is not then an act of malice but a logical inference.

Job's Integrity [7:45-8:22]

So, Job's integrity is Job is neither perfect nor right in his assessments about God or his policies. But that one thing he gets right, he retains his integrity. Again, in chapter 27, verses two through six that's accomplished when it's demonstrated that indeed Job does serve God for nothing. That is his integrity.

If Job followed the advice of his wife or the friends, it would demonstrate that he did not serve God for nothing. His integrity would be forfeited.

Job as Self-Righteous [8:22-9:29]

Job is also seen to be self-righteous, especially under Elihu's scrutiny. It is not justifiable to be self-righteous simply because someone is righteous, and that's true Job as well. His self-righteousness is a problem because he uses it as a means of setting himself higher than God. The problem arises when Job's view of his righteousness is so confident that he's ready to denigrate God's justice to maintain it. And, of course, God's words in chapter 40, verse eight, show that that's exactly what happened.

So, Job fails as a person on many counts in the book. He's a guy that's got a lot going for him, and he does certain important things right. But he also makes a lot of mistakes.

The Book is about God leading us to Better Responses [9:29-11:20]

And so again, we have to remember that Job as a character is not the focus of the book. The book is about God, not about Job. Job's responses are not models for us. There's a lot to commend him, but there's also a lot on which he stands condemned in the way that he responds to his situation. Job is just another character in the book who gets things wrong.

The book wants to tell us how to get things right. Job is a character in the book who has the most chance of getting things right. Because his righteousness is approved and recognized, but even someone with such high recognition of doing things right doesn't always respond well when things fall apart. The book wants to lead us to better responses when things go wrong, especially about how to think about God. Job's not a good model on all of that. And so, he's part of how the book unfolds its message. We need to learn the message of the book, not put Job on a high pedestal.

We're next going to turn our attention to the world. So that'll be the next segment of how the world plays its role in the book.

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