

## **The Book of Job**

### **Session 1: Interpretation Problems and False Ideas about the Book**

**By John Walton**

This is Dr. John Walton and his teaching on the Book of Job. This is session 1: Interpretation Problems and False Ideas about the Book.

#### **Introduction [00:24-2:06]**

Hello, I'm John Walton. I teach Old Testament at Wheaton College. I've been here for about 15 years. Before that, I taught at Moody Bible Institute, where I taught for 20 years. I did my Ph.D. work at Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, which prepared me well for the kinds of things that I do. Basically, I'm a text guy; that is, I analyze texts, whether it's Hebrew texts or texts of the ancient Near East. I try to bring those together to help us understand the Bible better.

We're going to be looking at the Book of Job together. The Book of Job is a very difficult book. It's unique, not only within the pages of the Old Testament but within the entire ancient world. There's nothing quite like the Book of Job. Although certainly, there are some things that overlap with it at one point or another.

We're going to be trying to understand the book as a whole, as well as the book in its various parts. So that's what we will be working at as we think together about the Book of Job and what it offers us.

So, let's get started. I want to start by just talking about some of the problems we face when we deal with the Book of Job. There are interpretation problems all around, and there are false ideas. There are things that people tend to think about in the Book of Job that put them on the wrong path right from the start. So, we want to pick those up at the beginning of this series and try to make sure that we're aiming in the right direction.

#### **What does Job say? [2:06-3:32]**

The first problem to deal with is what does the book actually say? The Hebrew in the Book of Job is the most difficult Hebrew in the Old Testament. It's been a problem.

There are many words that occur only once in the Hebrew Bible that we encounter in the Book of Job. There's difficult syntax. There are all kinds of difficulties in understanding the meanings of words and their use. So, our first task is translating a very difficult Hebrew book.

Even once we get to the point of translation, then we have to ask the question about literature. How did the author package the book? How did you put it together to make it work?

Some people have thought that the Book of Job is a patchwork quilt, that some parts weren't originally, and then it built gradually over time as different parts were added. And sometimes, they even think that those parts might be contradictory to one another. I'm not of that opinion. I tend to think of Job as a unified whole coherent text, but that takes some work to try to think through what it is doing literarily. How has the author put this book together to make it work? And so, we'll be taking a look at some of that as we go along.

### **Philosophical/Theological Issues [3:32-4:32]**

The next thing we have to deal with is the whole idea of the philosophical issues; the theological points that the book is making. We're well aware that in the Book of Job, some of the speakers are wrong. They are there to be wrong. Job's friends do not have the truth. Sometimes they have some of the truth. Sometimes they even have a lot of the truth, but it's inherently problematic what they are doing. And so, we have to be able to pick out: how does the theology of the book work? How does it do what it does? And so the philosophical/theological aspect is very important to us.

Once we get there, we have to move to the topic of, okay, fine for the theology of the book itself, what about for Christian theology--Christians today? How should we read the book? What does it have to offer us?

### **False Expectations [4:32-5:42]**

Now, some of the misplaced expectations about the book make it difficult for the book to deliver. Some people will read through the book expecting that this will be a book that will tell them about suffering and how they can understand why they are suffering. And they get to the end of the book, and they read God's speeches, and they are puzzled. What's going on here? And then Job just gets all this stuff back, and the book ends.

People feel so unsatisfied because they say that hasn't told me anything. What's the book got to deliver? If you go to the book of Job, thinking that you are getting an answer to why there is suffering in the world or in your life, you're going for the wrong reason. And you are going to be disappointed. It's not going to tell you that.

#### **1) Job has trials. Job is not on trial [5:42-7:48]**

So, let's take a look at some of the things that the book does and doesn't do. First of all, Job has trials. Job is not on trial. Job thinks he's on trial. His friends think he's on trial, but the book really makes it clear from the start that Job is not on trial. After all, what kind of trial would it be when he's exonerated in the first couple of verses? And when the major characters all the way through, continue to insist that Job's not the problem here. So even though Job has trials, he is not on trial.

Job thinks that he's the defendant in a criminal case, that he's been accused of wrongdoing, and that he's being punished for it. And so, he feels like he's a defendant in a case where he's on trial. Job tries to switch that around. He tries to set it up so that he's a plaintiff in a civil case; that is, he claims that he's been wronged, that he's been treated inappropriately, and that there's some compensation that's due him--a change in direction. So, he tries to switch things so that he's not a defendant but a plaintiff. It's an interesting little change of strategy. But in fact, neither is correct. We find out as readers, and Job never finds this out, by the way. We find out, as readers, that Job is the star witness for the defense. So, he has a different role from what he thinks or the people around him think he's in. So, remember that Job has trials, but he's not on trial.

## **2) Job is not about Job. It's about God [7:48-9:31]**

The second point, some people start out with this book and they say it's a Book of Job. And therefore, they, kind of understandably, imagine that the book is about Job; that the book is all about Job. It's not. The book is about God. Job is a main character. Job plays a significant role, but the book is more about God than Job. At the end of the book, it doesn't matter what we think about Job; it matters what we think about God. So, as we approach the book, remember we're looking for what it has to teach us about God, not what it has to teach us about Job.

We should not approach the book thinking the Job is going to stand as a role model, either a role model for suffering, for patience, for interaction, or for anything. Job is not a role model here. Job is kind of caught in something bigger than himself, and his responses are sometimes good ones, sometimes bad ones; sometimes it's hard to tell. But this book is not here so that Job can be a role model for us. It is a wisdom book, and it's to give us wisdom, and wisdom is ultimately about God. So that was point number two; it's more about God than about Job.

## **3) Job is not about God's justice; it's about God's wisdom [9:31-13:05]**

Number three, we often read the book thinking that it's going to help us understand how God's justice works in the world. That it's a book about God's justice that it seeks to defend God's justice. And again, I would say, no, I don't think it does. That's not what it's doing. You'll notice that in the end, when God has his say, he doesn't defend his justice. He never explains the scenario that is unfolded in terms of justice. If you're looking at something to get something from the book of Job that actually helps you understand God's justice, again, you will walk away disappointed because the book does not explain or defend God's justice. Job's accusations against God concern God's justice. Our questions about suffering often concern God's justice, but the Book of Job does not defend God's justice. Instead, it defends his wisdom. This is a wisdom book, not a justice book. It defends God's wisdom because that's what we rely on.

If we think that it defends his justice, then we, at every turn we're trying to justify, vindicate, somehow explain, defend. And for all of that, we would need to have all the information. Justice cannot be done without all the information on the table. If we hear about some verdict and a famous trial in court, it does us no good to sit and talk about whether we think justice was done or not if we don't have all the pieces of evidence before us. The judge has the evidence. The jury has the evidence, but we rarely do. And therefore, it's difficult to conclude that justice was or was not done. And with God, we can never have all the information. We are not in a position to try to talk about whether God is just or not.

In fact, that entire framing has problems. The minute that we say God is just, we have implied that there is some outside category called justice, and the God conforms to it. Theologically, God does not conform to anything because that would suggest contingency that somehow there's something outside of him that he has to measure up to. And that's not true about God. God is not contingent. So, to say God is just might imply an outside kind of standard. It's better to say that justice flows from God. But again, we never find out how all of those criteria work. So, in that regard, the book is not about justice. It's about God's wisdom.

#### **4) Job is not about suffering; it's about how to think about God when we're suffering [13:05-14:33]**

Number four, the book does not intend to teach us how to think about suffering. Sufferings are, and no matter what level we experience it or observe it, it's hard. We'd love to have explanations, but this book is not designed to help us to know how to think about suffering. It's designed to help us know how to think about God when we are suffering. That's what we really need to know. How do I respond to God? Do we blame him? Do we grow angry with him? Do we ignore him? Do we run away from him? What do we do? How do we think about God when the world's going wrong all around us? When our lives are just going downhill, everything's going south; how do we respond to God?

After all, it's easy to think: he should be able to fix this. It's easy to think with Job and his friends: do we deserve this? If not, then what's going on? Again, the book is to help us understand how to think about God when we are suffering. And that goes back to a point we made earlier that it's about God, not about Job.

#### **5) Job is not about getting answers; it is about trusting God [14:33-16:08]**

Point number five, lots of times, we read the book of Job to try to get answers, answers that might explain our own suffering; answers that might explain suffering we see in the world. Why is the world such a difficult place? And so, we think that the Book of Job might give us answers. We hope that. We would really like answers. And so, we go to the Book of Job, looking for answers. Therein lies the problem because the book is more about trusting than it is about answers. You don't need to trust if you know all the answers. Trusting is our response to God when we don't know what's going on. When we can't figure things out ourselves, trusting is a response to our ignorance and our confusion. It's then we need to turn to God. The Book of Job is not going to give answers. It's going to call on us to trust.

#### **6) Job is not about why or how to suffer; it's about our righteousness [16:08-17:24]**

Finally, number six, the book is more about what constitutes righteousness than about why we suffer. Remember the question that's put on the table right in the first chapter is posed to God: Does Job serve God for nothing? It's really a question that asks about what motivates Job's righteousness. Does his righteousness really stand up to the test? After all, if Job's behaving the way that he does, you know, righteous, upright, turning away from evil, if he's doing all of that, just because he expects to get prosperity and reward from it, then it's not going to stand up when all of the good benefits are taken away; that so-called righteousness is just going to dissolve in the wind.

#### **The Message of Job [17:24-19:12]**

So, this is a book about righteousness. It doesn't tell us how to suffer. It challenges us to be righteous even when we are suffering. It challenges us to be righteous because righteousness is what should characterize our lives. It calls us to be faithful to

God because God is God not because he's generous. God is not a vending machine. And so, the question here in the book is what motivates people to be righteous. Suffering is simply the way that righteousness is tested in the Book of Job. Suffering is there to discover whether Job's righteousness is real or not.

So, by the time we reach the end of the book, we shouldn't be expecting to find out why am I suffering? We should expect to find out: am I truly righteous? Am I righteous for the right reasons instead of the wrong reasons? Does my righteousness stand the test of suffering? That's what the book's going to help us figure out. That's really what's going on with Job.

### **Review: Six Points [19:12-21:10]**

So, let me review these six points. Job has trials, but he's not on trial. The book is more about God than it is about Job. The book is more about God's wisdom than about his justice. The book is not about how to think about suffering but how to think about God when we are suffering. The book is more about trust than about answers. And the book is more about what constitutes righteousness than about why we suffer.

These six points will help us to set aside false conceptions, misconceptions, and false expectations that we might have in the Book of Job. These six questions will help us to focus on what the book actually is doing. We'll be able to see more clearly how it is doing those things. Expectations are important. If we set up false expectations of life, of one another, of God, of the world; if we set up false expectations, then we're bound to be disappointed. So, we need to think about how God really operates, and the Book of Job can help us with that. So, let's look into its pages together to try to understand the message of the book.

This is Dr. John Walton and his teaching on the book of Job. This is session 1: Interpretation Problems and False Ideas about the Book. [21:10]

**The Book of Job**  
**Session 2: Date and Authorship**  
**By John Walton**

This is Dr. John Walton and his teaching on the Book of Job. This is session 2, Date and Authorship.

**No Books and Authors [00:21-1:37]**

Let's spend a few moments talking about the date and authorship of the Book of Job. Now, even as I introduce that line, we've got problems. We often try to look at various books of the Bible to ask about the date and authorship of the book. Here's the problem: there are no books in the ancient world, and there are no authors in the ancient world. The ancient world is not like our world at all. There's really no such thing as an author who writes a book. Instead of authors, we have authority figures who speak; and we have scribes who write. And, of course, they don't write books. They write documents, maybe a document that's recorded on a clay tablet or on papyrus or something of that sort, even on wax tablets. So, we don't have either books or authors in the ancient world.

**Hearing-Dominant Culture [1:37-2:45]**

The ancient world is a hearing-dominant world. By hearing-dominant, I mean that they are used to receiving their information through speaking and hearing. That's normal for them. In fact, authoritative words come that way. A spoken, heard message to them carries more authority than a written text. It's just not how we think. Authors today, of course, have intellectual property. There's copyright. There's nothing like that in the ancient world. And so, what we have is a very different world. When we begin by asking about authors and books, we've already forced the conversation into our world instead of being in its world where it belongs.



### **Authoritative Voice [2:45-4:13]**

So, in one sense, we're asking the wrong questions. Most of the books of the Old Testament did not start as books. Of course, I have to amend that most of what we call books in the Old Testament have eventually come down to us as books, but they didn't begin as books. They began as oral speech. They began then, some of them as documents, individual accounts, individual prophecies, and individual psalms, in documents. They don't start out with somebody sitting down to write a book. And yet, what eventually becomes a book is still firmly attached to the authority figures that began that communicative process. But sometimes, it may have been transmitted for centuries before actually being compiled into the books that we have. Yet, even then, the books preserve that authoritative voice from the past. So, books come at the end of the process, not at the beginning of the process. It doesn't start with the book. It ends with the book.

### **Job as a Book [4:13-4:55]**

Having said that, Job may be one of the exceptions. I say that because there's an awful lot in the book of Job that seems like it is a literary construct. That is, it has been put together as a whole piece, not just as one friend's speech and another friend's speech that are kind of kept separate or something. These all work together. So, it may be that Job is one of the few or the only book in the Old Testament that actually seems to have begun as a book.

### **Writing in a Hearing-Dominant Culture [4:55-6:44]**

Now, of course, we may have the tradition of Job, the story of Job, and the narrative that may have existed before. We'll deal with some of those things as we go along. But the book is a highly composed piece of literature. And so, we need to take that into consideration. Now in the ancient world, they weren't tied to morality, speech, and hearing because they were illiterate. Certainly, people probably learned to write at least the basic level. And there are others, of course, that were quite literate, by training and by their profession--scribes especially. But in the ancient world, people didn't need to write.

They didn't need to read. It was a hearing-dominant culture and therefore, nothing in the culture was dependent on them reading or writing. That means even if they learned a little bit of it, they never used it.

It's like some people today who might study a foreign language when they're in high school, and then they never use it. And while they studied it, and maybe it'll do him some good somewhere along the line, they don't remember it. They lose it after a while. It's not something that they really are able to work in that language. It's a lot like that, I think, with reading and writing in the ancient world. They could do some basics, but the operation of society and culture did not depend on people knowing how to read and write. It only depended on some people knowing how to do that.

### **Role of Scribes [6:44-7:51]**

Today lots of people have a basic understanding of the legal requirements in our society, but they're not lawyers. They understand that if they need something done really seriously, they need to go to a lawyer and have a document drawn up. They wouldn't do it on their own. And so, in the ancient world, they had scribes. And when they really needed something written, which wasn't near as much as we do, then they would get a scribe to do it. The documents that were written were not accessible, even if you think of some of the narrative traditions of the Israelites being written down earlier rather than later. If they were, they would have been written down, and they're in scribal archives, and nobody really has access to those. Nobody takes a book out of the library to read it. It just doesn't work that way. So even if they're written into documents, scribes are practicing their work by copying them, things of that sort.

### **Job as a Literary Construct [7:51-8:44]**

So, it's a very different culture, and it's a hearing-dominant culture. The speeches in the Book of Job are highly literate speeches. It strikes us right away; these are not the kinds of things that a lot of people could just speak extemporaneously. It's very flowery prose and sometimes poetry of sorts. But it's a sophisticated level of language.

There are probably some people that can talk like that extemporaneously, but not too often. And so, we tend to think of the speeches in the Book of Job as literary constructs. We'll get back to that issue later on.

### **Events of Job [early]; Writing of Job [late] [8:44-10:58]**

So, we're not really talking about the date of the authorship and Book of Job. If author and book are not really very acceptable labels to use for the ancient world, we'd like to know a little bit about how the book came together. Well, another thing that we have to understand is that we don't have to think that the book was written at the time that Job lived. There are a couple of indicators in the book that Job lives in an earlier, rather than a later period in terms of society around him. But there are also indications in the book that the literary focus of the book is later rather than earlier. That leads us to think that even if Job is dated as a person at a very early period, that doesn't mean that the book is written in that early period or composed; let's use that word as neutral, composed at that early period. The person could be early, and the composition could be late. So, just because we see certain indicators in the Book of Job that he may have been from an early time period, that doesn't mean the book is an early product.

So, when we look at the details in the book, we find some very small things. For instance, it talks about a unit of money that *kesitah* and we only know of that unit of money in earlier periods. That's a pretty small item, especially since we're dealing with a situation outside of Israel, but there you have it. The book also talks about some of the raiding parties as Chaldean and Sabeian. And in some of the research done on the history of the period, that seems to suggest an earlier time period rather than a later one.

### **Job is a non-Israelite, but the book is written to Israelites [10:58-12:43]**

Some thought that the book must be early, meaning pre-Sinai before Moses, because there's no mention of covenant or law or temple. It's true. Those things are not mentioned. Furthermore, we see Job acting as a patriarchal priest. He serves as a priest for the family, and that strikes some as an earlier issue.

But considering for a moment the book is very clear that Job is not an Israelite. If Job is not an Israelite, then we wouldn't expect covenant or law or temple. In other cultures, and other societies outside of Israel, it would be very appropriate in a tribal culture for the patriarch to act as a priest. Those things don't really help us identify date. They only help us to see that it's not an Israelite that we're dealing with. Job is from the land of Uz. And we'll talk some about where that is and if we know where that is. But it makes a strong point that he's not an Israelite. And if he's not an Israelite, those details don't really mean anything.

On the other hand, interestingly enough, the book is written to Israelites, and we can detect that; we'll get to that a little bit later, in a later lecture. We can detect that Israelite orientation, even in a book that is focused on a non-Israelite character.

### **Date of Composition [12:43-13:12]**

So, the date of composition of the book is likely a different date from the date of the events. And therefore, we can't tell the date of the book from the events. If it truly is a book focused on Israelites, then we expect it to be later rather than earlier. And so, we'll be looking at some of those issues.

### **Job as a Wisdom Book: Enduring Truths [13:12-14:43]**

All that having been said, we have to remember that the book of Job is a wisdom book. It's not intended to be just somebody's story. It's intended to be a wisdom book. And the very nature of wisdom literature is that the truths are timeless. That's the very point of wisdom that these are truths that anybody at any time can benefit from. And so, we really have to recognize that in the end, it doesn't matter whether we think of it as oral or written, whether we think of it as a book or a compilation of documents, whether we think of it in literary terms or in rhetorical terms, whether we think of it as Israelite or non-Israelite, early or late, it doesn't make a difference. We're reading the book for its wisdom teaching. Therein lies the authority of the book. And so, that's what we're going

to focus on--the wisdom teaching. And we can safely set the issue of date and authorship aside as not having a, not making a difference in how we read the book itself.

This is Dr. John Walton and his teaching on the Book of Job. This is session 2: Date and Authorship. [14:43]

**The Book of Job**  
**Session 3: Job as a Book with Authority and Inspiration**  
**By John Walton**

This is Dr. John Walton and his teaching on the Book of Job. This is session 3, Job as a Book with Authority and Inspiration.

**Introductory Questions [00:24-1:06]**

So, here's the problem, if much of what Job's friends say is wrong, and if even some of the things that Job himself says are wrong, how do we talk about the book as true? How do we consider it to have authority? How does this come from God? So, we need to talk a little bit about Job as a book with authority--Job as an inspired book. So, let's see what we've got here.

**Inspiration: God as its Source [1:06-1:58]**

First of all, we need to understand our terms. When we talk about inspiration, what we mean is that the book has its source in God. Inspiration doesn't imply some kind of whispering voice in the ear or thoughts planted in the mind. Inspiration indicates that the source is God. That's, of course, what the New Testament means when it talks about God's word as being God-breathed. Its source is God. So, that's what we mean by inspiration. We don't have to think that God is somehow whispering the wrong thoughts in the ears of Eliphaz or Zophar or Bildad. So, it's inspiration--authority.

**Authority and Our Submissive Response [1:58-2:53]**

Authority means that the book gives information we can rely on. It is what authority has to do with. Authority indicates that the book has a right to speak. And, of course, that's because of its inspiration. By virtue of the inspiration from God, the book has a right to speak, and that gives it an authoritative position. But not only does it have a right to speak. It's right in what it speaks because it's good authority, not bad authority.

So, it gives information that we can rely on and that we need to submit to. That's how you respond with authority.

### **Revelation and Discerning the Wisdom Message [2:53-5:19]**

We also talk about the book as revelation. We call the Bible God's revelation of himself. And that means that we find the book to be true and dependable, the same kinds of things we've talked about with the other words. It also tells us what the book is doing and what it's not doing. Think back to our discussion about what the book is not doing. The idea that this is God's revelation of himself means that we are going to find the authority of the book in the revelation that it gives us. It's revelation in that message, which is being affirmed through the wisdom literature that it contains. And so, its revelation and its authority are tied to the wisdom message more than to the narrative itself in the speeches. We have to discern the message because most of the book is wrongheaded thinking. It's there to be wrongheaded thinking. So that in seeing the wrong way of thinking, we have a chance to try to identify the right way of thinking.

So, we need to identify what it is that the book affirms as true. Not everything in the content of the book is affirming some kind of truth or true message. We have to discern that as careful readers. It's what faithful interpreters always do; figure out what the affirmation of the text is. The friends of Job cannot be counted on as speaking the truth though sometimes they do. And sometimes, the falsehood of what they say is just a shade off of the truth. Those are the most effective falsehoods, after all, the ones that sound so much like truth. But likewise, the heavenly antagonist cannot be relied upon to speak the truth. Again, sometimes he does. We'll talk about that.

### **Authority is not in its Historicity [5:19-6:37]**

Perhaps a more difficult point, and I want you to think about it carefully, is that the authority of the book is not tied up in whether it's an accurate account of real events in a real past. This is not presented as truth through narrative. It's presented as truth through wisdom. That doesn't mean we just assume the narrative is false, or it never

happened, but we have to think carefully. The authority is not in its historicity, because this is not that kind of book. The truth does not depend on its historicity, whether the events really happened, whether they're really events in a real past. The truth does not depend on that. That doesn't mean that they didn't happen, but we just have to think through that carefully. And, in the end, what we have to be interested in is the authority of the book.

### **Similar to Jesus' Parables [6:37-7:41]**

And the book is affirming a wisdom teaching more than it's affirming a narrative event; we have to be aware of that. This is the same thing that happens with Jesus' parables. They are narratives, but Jesus is not presenting them as real events in a real past. They have a realism about them, but they usually also have some unrealistic elements that make the parable work, a realistic setting, but some unusual, even strange things that happen. That's what makes the parable workable. We find the same thing here with Job. I'm not suggesting it's a parable, but in the same way, it's like parables that are not dependent on these being real events. It's very realistic in some ways and very unrealistic in others. And we'll talk about that more as we go on.

### **Authority in its Wisdom Message [7:41-10:03]**

So, authority is not in the historicity, and truth does not depend on the historicity. Authority is in the wisdom message of the book, regardless of the extent to which these are real events in a real past. Wisdom gets at a deeper truth than events themselves. Wisdom is looking for a truth that cannot necessarily just be observed in the unfolding of events. We can see things happen in our own lives, and there the events are before us. But what do we do with those? How do we think about them? How do we respond to events in our lives wisely?

Wisdom does not come automatically with the unfolding of events. Wisdom comes when we look past the event, look deeply into the event, and look beyond the event to understand the truth that we need to see; the wisdom that we can gain. And in



that sense, wisdom transcends events. And just as the wisdom of Christ's parables transcends the events that he puts together for his stories, so, we're going to find that to be true in the Book of Job. Wisdom gets at a deeper truth. There's truth in ideas, truth that we need to understand in the ideas that the book presents, things that cannot be seen. And instead of being connected to what can be seen, that's a kind of truth that wisdom gets to beyond our immediate sight. And so we have to look at those ideas that the book is presenting. That's where the authority of the book is vested.

### **Knowing God [10:03-12:03]**

Let me give you another thought. We talk about it as God's revelation of himself. In the end, however, the revelation we receive in this book is a little bit more about how God works and doesn't work. It only gives us limited information about who God is. That's a problem, isn't it that we have? We want to know God, and we feel like we can know him through the pages of Scripture. But yet we feel like, first of all, that we have trouble penetrating to really know him because it's not the same as our relationships with people that we encounter every day and interact with.

And so, we feel like there are some obstacles. The biggest obstacle of all is that he's God, and we're not. And therefore, he cannot be known by us very deeply. We can know him to the extent that he has revealed himself, but his ways are not our ways. And so, we can't know everything about him. The more we get to thinking that God is fully known by us is, probably the same extent to which we have made him in our own image. So, we have to recognize there are limitations on the knowledge of God that we can achieve.

### **Bible and Syllabus Illustration of Revelation [12:03-14:23]**

He has revealed what he's up to, and in so doing, he has revealed parts of himself that we can know. Let me give you an illustration. When I put together a syllabus and hand it out to students, I'm revealing something to them. I'm revealing my plans for the course, my purposes in the course, and I'm revealing to them how they are expected to participate in the course. In fact, to become partners in this learning experience. Those

are important things, and that's what a syllabus is for: to reveal my plans and purposes so that they can participate as active partners. Now, if they're very attentive to the syllabus, they can discern or infer something about me as a professor, as a person, and as a teacher. They can even understand whether I'm organized or not, whether I have a flair for design or not. They can tell some things about me from that syllabus. And in that sense, the syllabus is trying to reveal a little bit of myself, even as it focuses on my plans and purposes.

I think there's a benefit to thinking about the Bible a bit like a syllabus. In its pages, God has revealed his plans and purposes, his kingdom, and what role we have in that kingdom. He's given us enough to participate in his work, to be partners with him. He's made us in his image to be partners with him in a process. And so, he's given us enough to know what we need to do to participate in his plans and purposes. Along the way, we can learn a lot about his person, but there are more limitations there.

#### **Summary [14:23-15:17]**

So, as we think of the book of Job and the revelation that it offers us, we understand that it offers us information about God's work, how he does things, and how he wants us to think about him, but it's not going to give all the explanations of why God does what he does and give us this intimate insider look at God's reasoning. We're going to have to make those distinctions as we go along. So, we've got a book that is part of God's inspired word. It has its source in God. We've got a book that speaks with authority in what it affirms--its wisdom message. And we are expected to submit to that authority.

#### **Implications of Authority and Our Submission to It [15:17-16:20]**

Once we accept the Bible as authoritative, we can't allow ourselves the luxury, the freedom, to pick and choose. To say, well, I'll take that part, and I won't take that part. After all, we don't have the freedom, for instance, to respond to our governments by saying, we'll pay this part of the tax, but not that part. We're under authority. And once we discern the authoritative message, we are committed to submitting ourselves to that message as an inspired piece that has authority. And it reveals to us a little bit about how

God does and does not work. That's the kind of wisdom message that is affirmed for us in the Book of Job. And we want to understand every single bit of it that we can.

This is Dr. John Walton and his teaching on the Book of Job. This is session 3, Job as a Book with Authority and Inspiration. [16:20]

## **The Book of Job**

### **Session 4: Genre and Structure and the Nature of Wisdom**

**By John Walton**

This is Dr. John Walton and his teaching on the Book of Job. This is session 4, Genre and Structure, and the Nature of Wisdom.

#### **Introduction [00:24-00:57]**

Well, the time has come for us to talk about the genre of the Book of Job and its structure. So, here's what we have to think about: is this book real? Some people would answer that question by asking, is it history or fiction? I think that's a false dichotomy. Those are the only two options on the table.

#### **Importance of Genre [00:57-4:16]**

And so, we have to think about what the book is doing and how it's doing it. Now that's a question of genre, but we have to understand that genre is a tricky thing. Genre helps us to know how to read a book. You know, if we were reading a mystery, we'd read it differently than if we're reading a biography. If we're reading an editorial, that's different from reading a comic strip. We read things differently when we understand their genre.

But what genre does or an identification of genre positions a piece of literature in a community of like literature. It identifies the things that are like it, and by doing so, it gives us strategies for reading that are based on the group as a whole. That means in order for a genre identification to be meaningful, we have to have other members in the set, otherwise, it really doesn't help us to read.

There's where we run into some problems with Job. On the one hand, we can identify it easily enough as wisdom literature. That's a broad category, but we know that there are many different genres of wisdom literature. Proverb, a proverb is a genre of wisdom literature. That's far different than a dialogue; there could be a wisdom dialogue.

And so, saying it is wisdom literature gives us a broad category and gives us some sense of expectation, but it doesn't really give us a strategy per se.

And that's where we run into a problem with the Book of Job. There's nothing like it. There is no community of literature other than the broad scope of wisdom. It's true, I mean, we have pieces of literature that are dialogues and Job has some dialogue in it. We have pieces of literature that are wisdom hymns, and Job has a wisdom hymn. We have pieces of literature that are discourse, and Job has some discourses. So, it has bits and pieces of genres that we know from other pieces.

But when you look at the Book of Job as a whole, there's nothing like it. There are other books that deal with innocent suffering in the ancient world, but they're really not like Job at all. So, as a result, we have numerous genres within the book. We have a number of similar scenarios in the ancient Near Eastern world, but we really don't have anything that's quite like the Book of Job, which means that we're a little bit on our own outside of those general categories that we can deal with.

### **Job as a Thought Experiment [4:16-5:57]**

It is wisdom literature, and that can guide us through a lot of our questions about reading strategy. One form of wisdom literature, and it's the one that I would like to propose, is the form of thought experiment. In a thought experiment, you propose a scenario. It's a scenario that's carefully constructed to have all the features necessary for an issue to be explored. Again, we find that Jesus does this in the parables. The parables are not an account, a narrative, about real events. They're events that, in some senses, could have been real, but in another sense are not. The details are put together in a particular way to help us to think about an issue. So, a parable is one form of thought experiment.

I don't believe that Job is a parable, but I think that it is another form of thought experiment. In a thought experiment, it's sort of a what-if scenario. What if we had this kind of situation? The point is not to claim that the events in the thought experiment did

happen, but they draw their philosophical strength from their realistic nature of the imaginative device.

### **Pushing Extremes [5:57-7:28]**

Think of this, and it really could happen, but this is more extreme. Everything's extreme in the Book of Job. We'll notice that everything is as stretched to the extreme as it can possibly be. It's those extremes that make the book work. If Job were less righteous, he's kind of a pretty good most of the time, then the book wouldn't work because you could say, "Oh, he did do some things wrong," and that could be the problem. If his suffering were less dramatic, if it had come on gradually or really wasn't so thorough, comprehensive, we might say, "Well, he's suffering a little bit. Everybody suffers a little bit." And, you know, we could account for that perhaps. A little bit of not righteous behavior and a little bit of suffering, and well, that's the world that we often face. But no, no, in the Book of Job, everything's pulled to the furthest extreme. So that no easy answers are left on the table, see that's the strategy. Remove all the easy answers, and you're left to deal with the philosophical idea, the wisdom point.

### **Job as a Literary Construct [7:28-11:21]**

The question about whether the events are real then is misplaced. They're almost put together to be surreal yet to be real enough, but more, more extreme than what we could imagine. Now, let's think through this a bit. If it's a thought experiment, then at least some parts of the book, we would have to just call it a literary construct rather than a real event, a literary construct.

Now there are some parts of the book that everyone has long agreed are literary constructs. The speeches of the friends, people don't talk that way, just extemporaneously. People don't just casually talk in this highly elevated language. Even some of our best rhetoricians don't talk that way. And furthermore, even if they did, even if you could say, well, in the ancient world they did, and these were really smart guys and et cetera, et cetera, there's no stenographer. They don't have stenographers in the ancient

world to sit down there and take it all down. The speeches of the friends are a literary construct. Everyone has recognized that.

But do you see what that does? As soon as we identify some part of the book as a literary construct, we then have to ask the question, how far does that go? How much of it is a literary construct, and how much of it might be just a record of events? Where do you draw the line? And once you've acknowledged that some parts of the book are a literary construct, it doesn't matter where you draw the line because a literary construct is okay in a thought experiment.

Now I do believe that Job was a real person in a real past that he had become well known in the ancient world as a really good person who had really desperate events come upon him. I tend to think that he really is such a person. But I think that this story about him is a thought experiment using this well-known person in order to investigate a wisdom concept. So, I take the basic form of the narrative. No, I shouldn't say that the basic content and the narrative, meaning the life of Job, a man's righteous suffering, are a kind of historical anchor in a real past. But I think that most of the rest of the book is a thought experiment, a literary construct. Again, the use of extremes, and the philosophical issues that are brought to the table, are all to make the point.

### **God's Words in a Thought Experiment [11:21-12:53]**

Now, maybe you're struggling with that idea. Keep thinking about it. Maybe you're not, but maybe my next step will be one that is even harder to swallow. So, think with me, if the book, for the most part, is a thought experiment, a literary construct, is that also true of the speeches of God? Is this also an inspired author, putting words in the mouth of God to address the issue at hand? And what does it say about the opening scene in heaven? Is that also a literary construct? Is that also designed to set up an extreme situation? It may be important to think about it that way. I am proposing that you at least think about it in those terms. Remember, the truth of the book is in its wisdom teaching, that is, what's being affirmed. The truth of the book does not require anything on the level

of historicity. It's a wisdom book. And if it's a thought experiment. It is painted in extremes.

### **Benefits of Seeing Job as a Thought Experiment [12:53-14:40]**

Here's the advantage to thinking about even the scene in heaven as part of the literary construct thought experiment. It'll help us avoid the significant problem of thinking that's how God really operates. If this is a thought experiment, it's just saying, what if such a scene in heaven would open? What if this is the shape the conversation took place? All of that is to set up the scenario for Job. Do you see how this avoids certain things that readers often struggle with in the book? This does not intend to convey a picture of a God who makes a wager with the devil; for some people, that's been a real problem to think that God would work that way. For some people, they look at the book, and they look at their lives, and they say, "Maybe God and Satan are having a conversation about me. Maybe my experiences are because of some divine wager." That is not what we ought to be getting from this book. That is not an option on the table. That's not what this book is doing. These are obviously complicated issues and complex for us to think through. But think about it.

### **The book is not about Heavenly Discussions [14:40-15:47]**

The teaching of the book is not tied to the reality of the events. The teaching of the book is built from the literary scenario that is laid out. And if it's a thought experiment, there's been a lot of creativity going into laying out that scenario. Just try it. Just try it so the easy answers are off the table, and there's room for discussion about how we should think about the world and what God does or does not do. I don't mean what he does or does not do in a session in heaven, but how do we think about God and his responsibility for suffering or how he's not responsible for suffering? How do we think about God's role in the events that we encounter in the world? It's not about what goes on in the heavenly discussions.



### **Rhetorical Strategy: Structure and the Wisdom Hymn [15:47-20:20]**

So, with that kind of thought experiment idea in mind, we want to talk about how the book accomplishes its teaching. This is what we call the rhetorical strategy. It talks about how the book is laid out literarily. The structure of the book is pretty easy to identify. It has a sandwiching effect. We've got a prose prologue with the scene in heaven and Job's experiences. We have a prose epilogue where God restores Job. So those are the two bookends.

In the very middle of the book, we have a hymn to wisdom. Many people have wondered about that hymn to wisdom. In a casual reading, one can easily think that it's Job speaking. Job is speaking in chapter 27. Chapter 28 is the hymn to wisdom. And in chapter 29, Job is speaking. It doesn't introduce a new speaker in 28. And so, some people have assumed that it's just Job speaking straight through.

But there's a problem. The section that ends in 27 is the dialogue section of the book. The section that starts in 29 is the discourse section of the book. This hymn to wisdom is squarely between them. In fact, it provides a transition from the dialogue section to the discourse section. What we find, whether we're looking in the dialogue section or the discourse section, is that nowhere does Job have the kind of perspective that is represented in chapter 28. The hymn to wisdom has a position, a perspective, and insight that Job does not have as a person either before or after. Therefore, it's really out of place in Job's mouth.

The alternative, and one that many people adopt and I agree with it, is that in the hymn to wisdom in chapter 28, the narrator comes back into play. The one who gave us the epilogue, I'm sorry, the prologue and the epilogue, who set up the scene and brings it to the conclusion, has come back into the middle. And he comes back in after we've completed the dialogue between Job and his friends.

That's the dialogue section that starts in chapter three and goes through chapter 27. With Job and his friends kind of alternately talking to one another, and all of that winds down, the speeches get shorter. And in the last one, Zophar doesn't even have

anything to say. He's made his point. He's done. Bildad's is very short. They've kind of run out of steam in the dialogue. Remember, this dialogue is supposed to be taking place among the wisest people known in the ancient world, and you get to the end of it and the hymn to wisdom in a very elaborate and eloquent way basically says, "Is that all you've got? Is that it? Do you think that is wisdom? You haven't even scratched the surface."

And the book then, in that hymn to wisdom, turns our attention from what looks like a discussion about justice. And it says, "No, you're missing it. You're missing it entirely. It's about wisdom." So, the hymn to wisdom, I believe, plays a very significant role in the middle of the book, as it transitions us from dialogue to discourse, as it shows that really the dialogue section accomplished nothing as it brings a narrator back into kind of move us along to the next part. And it helps us to see what the issue really is. We'll come back to that later on.

### **Dialogues and Discourses [20:20-23:30]**

So, we've got our prologue and epilogue. We've got the hymn to wisdom in the middle, and then the major sections are the dialogue and discourse. Dialogue comes first. This is where we find Job and his friends discussing the issues. And so, we have Eliphaz and Bildad, and Zophar, each giving speeches, with Job responding to them. That's the dialogue section. It starts with Job's lament in chapter three and picks up with Eliphaz's speech in chapter four and goes through 27, then to the hymn to wisdom and then the discourses.

The discourses are different from the dialogues because they're not interchanged. And so, here, these are just three characters giving speeches. Job gives his speeches in 29 to 31, Elihu gives his speeches in 32 to 37, and then Yahweh gives speeches and that fills out the discourse section.

So, we have the dialogues and the discourses, which contain lots of the raw content of the book. And then the epilogue draws it all to a close. Now I find this structure helps us to understand the rhetorical strategy. That is, the structure helps us to

work through how the case is being built. I don't see that any of the pieces could easily be left out in the book and still be coherent and accomplish its purposes. Yes, they're very different literarily. You've got narrative; you've got dialogue; you've got discourse; you've got hymn. They're very different, but they all work together, and you can't leave any one of them out and still have something that has a coherent message to it.

So, as we work through the book, we're going to be building the rhetorical strategy. We're going to be looking for the contribution that each part of the book makes because we believe that each part does make a contribution. We are treating the book as a coherent whole as a unity, not something that's been thrown together as a patchwork quilt or with many different hands. That's why I talked earlier about the idea that this may be one of those pieces that comes together as a book. If it's a literary construct, if it's constructed, composed, a thought experiment with a wisdom message and that all the pieces are part of it, this one actually may have been composed as a book. Though, the bards of the ancient world were talented, and they could put this together as a oral piece as well. It would be a lot to learn, a lot to memorize, but the bards of the ancient world did that. Some of the Homeric literature is pretty long itself, and that was passed along orally. So, it's hard to tell, and in the end, it doesn't matter.

### **Rhetorical Strategy and Authorial Intent [23:30-26:17]**

We've got the book as it is. It's got an identifiable, really easily identifiable structure. And that gives it its rhetorical strategy. And so, from that, we're going to try to understand the message of the book.

The rhetorical strategy tells us what the author is doing. The rhetorical strategy is the author's strategy. Again, I'm using author; that's kind of a shortcut here for the communicator, whether oral or written. It's the rhetorical strategy that helps us to see the intention of the author. And it's that intention that has authority. Remember, it's God's authority, but God has vested that authority in a human communicator. And if we're going to get God's authoritative message, we have to get it through the human

communicator. So, we're always looking for what we call the author's intention. What are they getting at?

I believe that part of the author's intention is a thought experiment. Some may differ, and that's okay. It will make a difference. It will affect how we think about different parts of the book. But in the end, that's what we're trying to get to. Remember, faithful interpreters, are pursuing the message of a book that was delivered by God, through a human communicator, a human instrument, to us.

The Bible was written for us, but it was not written to us. And so, we have to try to discern what it is that that human communicator was getting at. That's where we'll find the authority. We don't have the freedom to freelance, to kind of read our own thing into it. We don't have the freedom to say, "Oh, I think the book really wants me to think this way." If you can't get it from the book itself, you're not getting it from God. And then what good is it doing?

So, we pay attention to the genre with all of the problems we've suggested. We pay attention to the rhetorical strategy, all of that, trying to help us to get the best understanding we can of what the inspired book has to say, that the author intended as God communicated through them.

This is Dr. John Walton and his teaching on the Book of Job. This is session 4, Genre and Structure, and the Nature of Wisdom. [26:17]

## **The Book of Job**

### **Session 5: Job and the Ancient Near East**

**By John Walton**

This is Dr. John Walton and his teaching on the Book of Job. This is session 5, Job and the Ancient Near East.

#### **Review [00:22-2:44]**

The next thing that we need to talk about is how Job and the Book of Job relate to the ancient Near Eastern background in which they exist. We've already talked about the idea that the Bible is written for us but that it's not written to us. It's not in our language. It's not in our culture. It doesn't anticipate our culture or any other culture since that time. So, it doesn't anticipate a Byzantine culture and speak to a Byzantine culture. It doesn't anticipate a medieval culture. It doesn't anticipate a far Eastern culture or an African culture, or an American culture.

It doesn't anticipate a culture, but the needs of people have certain similarities. We need to know God. And so, it's for us to help us to know God and his plans and purposes; to think well and right about God, but it's not to us. It doesn't assume our culture or anticipate our culture.

The book of Job then is fully embedded in the ancient world. Even though it's not indebted to any given piece of literature in the ancient world, it's embedded in it. And that embeddedness means that the conversation is unfolding in that context, that even when the book of Job is taking a different perspective than what others in that time and culture might take, it's still having the conversation in the context of that culture. We've mentioned that Job is not an Israelite. He's from the land of Uz. So, he's not an Israelite, but it's very evident the book is an Israelite book. That is, it is framed by Israelites for Israelites.

#### **Pious Sufferer in Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) Literature [2:44-6:33]**

By talking about, the situation of a pious sufferer, it fits into a category that's known in the ancient world. There are quite a number of pieces of literature that discuss

the pious sufferer. But the answers given in the book of Job are quite a bit different from what we find in the ancient world.

Some of the pieces in the ancient world that follow this kind of pattern is the early Sumerian piece called, A Man and His God. There the person who is suffering confesses himself as ignorant of any offense that he might've committed. His condition is that he suffers from an illness. He's a social outcast. But at the end of the book, sins are identified to him, and he confesses his sins and is restored to health. The philosophy behind that book is there's no sinless child born. In other words, everyone has sins, and it results in a hymn of praise, which is the theology of that book.

An Akkadian Mesopotamian piece is called A Dialogue Between a Man and His God. Again, they're ignorant of any possible offense. The pious sufferer motif is the idea that someone who, on the surface, looks like they've done everything they need to do and that they're pious in all the essential ways, but that they're suffering. And so, in this Dialogue between a Man and His God, this man suffers illness and eventually is restored to health. There's no philosophy offered. There's no divine favor assured.

One of the most famous pieces of the ancient world is called Ludlul bel Nemeqi, I will Praise the God of Wisdom. It's an Akkadian piece and so Babylonian. Here again, we have a character who is conscientious and pious in every way, ignorant of any possible offense. And yet, he finds himself a social outcast. The communication from the gods is unclear. He's suffering from an illness. His protective spirits have been chased away. He talks about demon oppression. And so, he's in this kind of situation. In a resolution of his situation, the god appears in a dream and so informs him. The outcome is he's given a way to make a purification offering that brings appeasement, and his own offenses are born away. His demons are expelled, he's restored to health. This, then again, indicates that he really was not without offense. The philosophy behind this piece says that the gods are inscrutable; who knows what they're doing. And it results in a hymn of praise to the Babylonian god, Marduk.

One final one is called the Babylonian Theodicy. In this one, again, the person claims piety, but his family has gone, and he's suffering poverty. And, in this case, there's really no resolution of his situation. They conclude that the purposes of the god are remote and that you really can't tell what they're doing. It voices the opinion that the gods have made people with evil inclinations and prone to suffering. And so that's simply the way the world is.

### **Ideas in the ANE Sources [6:33-11:02]**

These are some of the more popular pieces that we know from the ancient world. And we can see that they offer a very different perspective on the gods and on the suffering that people experience. So, the answer we find here is divine inscrutability. You can't really know what the gods are doing. The inherent sinfulness of humanity, everybody sins, everybody commits offenses, and therefore in suffering, you can never claim that it was not deserved. Or, even the gods make humanity crooked. Other times they express the idea that nobody can really do everything that the gods require. So, there would always be something that the gods can get angry about.

Generally, in the ancient Near East, there's less of an inclination to assign blame. People are really without information. The gods have not communicated forthrightly. When you talk about Egyptians or Babylonians or Canaanites, or Hittites, the gods have not revealed themselves. And so, there's no clear communication about what they desire, what will please them or what will offend them. There's no sense of that in the ancient world.

Furthermore, people believed that the gods were largely inconsistent. They have their own agendas, and they're capricious. Day by day, they might act differently. And therefore, even though they feel that their situation is the result of the god's neglect or anger or change of mind for one reason or another, they really have no way to think through it all. In the ancient world, they believed that if the gods became angry, they would remove their protection, and as a result, the person would be vulnerable, in

jeopardy from demonic powers or just the forces that are around there. And so, we find that in the piece I've identified as Ludlul bel Nemeqi, after the sufferer has done everything that he can think to do. He has these words: "I wish I knew that these things were pleasing to one's god. What is proper to oneself is an offense to one's god. What in one's own heart seems despicable is proper to one's god. Who knows the will of the gods in heaven? Who understands the plans of the underworld gods? Where have mortals ever learned the way of a god?"

Can you hear his frustration? Can you sense what it would be like to live in such a world, knowing that there are powerful beings who affect every part of life and yet have not told you what they expect of you or what will make them pleased or angry.

Think if you worked in a job like that, where your boss was holding you accountable and yet never made it clear what it was you were supposed to do or not supposed to do. And that you were punished or rewarded based on your guesses. That's very uncomfortable.

I hope this insight helps us to a new appreciation of our God who has communicated and has revealed what will please him or not and who has let us know what he's like and has said that that's not going to change day by day. It should give us a new appreciation, and gratitude that God, in his grace, has communicated to us. So, that's a little bit of what's behind the literature of a book like Job, some of those scenarios. But Job so far transcends them; has so much more to offer.

**Job has Israelite thinking: 1) No polytheism [11:02-12:12]**

Now, I mentioned that Job thinks like an Israelite, even though he is not an Israelite. Where do we see that? We see it, for instance, in that Job has no inclination toward polytheism whatsoever. That's really strange because in the ancient world, polytheism is the only way to think about the gods. And so, the idea that God is in community, we see a little bit of a community in the opening chapters because of the divine council, but no inclination toward polytheism. In fact, Job makes some affirmations to stand against polytheism. In his oath in Job 31:26, he swears that he has



not lifted up his hands to the sun or moon. That only makes sense in an Israelite context. All the rest of the peoples around routinely worshiped the sun and moon and gladly did so. That wasn't something that was a flaw. So, only in an Israelite context would that be a reasonable claim to make that he had not done that.

## **2) No Curiosity as to which god brings trouble [12:12-12:46]**

The second point is that Job shows no curiosity whatsoever about which god has brought him trouble. He seems to know exactly which God he's talking to, and no others are in the picture to kind of mess up or confuse the situation. He doesn't make any appeal to any other god. Sometimes if one god is giving you trouble, you can appeal to another god to help you out of it. Job does no such thing. He's only working through one God.

## **3) Deserved or Undeserved Punishment [12:46-14:33]**

He thinks in terms of whether his punishment is deserved or not. Now in the ancient world, I've mentioned the various pieces. They do talk about their ignorance of any offense and, therefore, can't imagine what they could have done to bring the anger of the gods. But in the end, they often assume that there was an offense. They just weren't aware of it. They were ignorant of it and that they'd somehow offended the gods. Job thinks in terms of whether his righteousness or offenses actually have earned him this punishment. And it shows a little clearer level of thinking than what you'd find in the ancient Near East. Specifically, kind of on the other side of it, Job is quite certain of his righteousness. In the ancient Near East, they could only be certain that they had done everything they knew to perform the appropriate rituals to keep the god happy.

But righteousness, the way it's portrayed in Job, is really not on the table in the ancient world. The obligations of people in the ancient world were ritual in nature, not some sort of absolute righteousness in abstraction that can be defined. Their only righteousness was in doing whatever it took to please the gods whose demands had not been made very well-known. Job has a good deal of certainty about his righteousness. Again, it gives it a very Israelite feel.

#### 4) The Great Symbiosis Not in Job [14:33-18:24]

Also, in Job connected to that, there's no suggestion of what I call the great symbiosis. Let me explain that to you. The great symbiosis in the ancient world talks about how gods and people interact. In the ancient world at large, they believed that the gods had created humans because the gods had gotten tired of meeting their own needs. In this way of thinking, gods get hungry, gods get thirsty, gods need clothing, and gods need housing. They are a lot like human beings; they had needs. They had to grow their own food, irrigate their own fields, and build their own houses. And it was just tiring, exhausting work. The gods were tired of it. And so, they decide, we'll create slave labor. We'll create people, and they will meet our needs. We'll create people and they will grow food and feed us. They will make beautiful garments for us and clothe us. And they will build splendid houses, and they'll pamper us in every way. What a great idea. And so, that's what they did. So, people were created so that they would meet the needs of the gods and pamper them.

Now that's one side of the great symbiosis: what people were supposed to do for the gods. But of course, it has the other side, what gods, therefore, had to do for people. Because once they became dependent on people to meet their needs, they had to somehow preserve them. They had to send enough rain so people could grow food to feed the gods and to feed themselves because otherwise, they would die and they couldn't feed the gods. They had to protect them so that invaders wouldn't come and destroy them because then they couldn't feed the gods. So, the gods had to protect their interests by providing for people and protecting people.

So, in that way, there's this codependency that builds up; where the gods depend on the people to pamper them, to meet their needs. And people depend on the gods to protect them and provide for them.

That's a little bit where justice comes into the system because the gods were interested in preserving justice. Not because justice was kind of somehow inherent in their nature, but because if there was mayhem and chaos, and trouble in society, if society

was not ordered and just, then there were all kinds of problems, and people couldn't attend to their task. The task was: to pamper the gods. So, if there were people fighting amongst each other, if society was full of unrest, then the gods weren't being attended to. So, the gods had some self-interest in making sure there was justice, and order in society. So, this is the great symbiosis, this codependency, mutual need, where the gods need people, and people need the gods.

### **5) Does Job Serve God for Nothing?—Israelite [18:24-19:51]**

Now, when the question is put on the table about Job, does Job serve God for nothing? You can see that that hits at the very foundation of this great symbiosis. In the ancient world, nobody served god for nothing. The whole idea of serving god was so that god would return the favor. Their idea of offering the rituals was so that the gods would bring prosperity and protection. Nobody in the ancient world served god for nothing. This shows us how Israelite this book is because the very premise of the question in the book is a premise that denies that the great symbiosis will always be in place or that it is being worked out. Only in Israel could you begin to think in that direction. Job was thinking like an Israelite. There's no concept of disinterested righteousness in the great symbiosis.

### **6) Job's Disagreement with Friends shows he's Israelite [19:51-21:56]**

Furthermore, Job's Israelite thinking is reflected as he enters into a disagreement with his friends. His friends think like ancient Near Eastern folks. They think that Job needs to appease God so that God will give him his benefits back. I call it, getting your stuff back, how to get your stuff back. All of the advice of Job's friends is about, here's what you need to do to get your stuff back. If you do these things, then God's anger will be appeased, and you'll get your stuff back. In other words, they are representing this view which says, "Job, it's really all about the stuff." Whereas the very issue in the book is it's not about the stuff, or does Job really think it's not about the stuff? Is Job's righteousness disinterested? That is, is he really not interested in the benefits but only interested in righteousness? Job's friends keep trying to turn his interest to the benefits of

how he can restore his stuff. If Job listens to them, the whole book falls apart. So, the friends think like ancient Near Eastern people, and Job is showing his sort of Israelite-style thinking by refusing to accept that kind of thinking.

So, Job is not an Israelite, but he thinks like an Israelite. He acts like an Israelite. And so, an Israelite reader will identify themselves with Job's perspectives.

### **7) Book's focus is Israelite: no Ritual Appeasement [21:56-23:24]**

Now, not only that, but the book's focus is Israelite. Not only does Job think and act like an Israelite, but the book's focus is also Israelite. So, for instance, there is no possibility of thinking that there is a ritual offense as an explanation for Job's situation. That's how it would have been in the ancient Near East. That's how it is in all those pieces of literature we looked at. The idea was that there must've been some ritual offense and therefore, there must be some ritual appeasement, some ritual solution. The Book of Job is simply not giving any attention to that possibility. It's taking an Israelite focus.

There's no thought of appeasement as an effective response. The idea is that somehow God is just irrationally angry and needs to be appeased. If it were that, Job wouldn't be calling him into court for an explanation. So, there's no thought of that kind of appeasement. His friends would like him to appease them. Although, again, it's not appeasement in a ritual sense. The book doesn't take that tact. So, even the friends who represent ancient Near Eastern thinking don't propose a ritual solution.

### **8) God's Justice and Job's righteousness is Israelite [23:24-24:51]**

The idea that there is an interest in the book, both in God's doing justice and in Job's righteousness, makes it very unlike the matrix of thinking in the ancient Near East. The ancient Near East would not show interest in those things. The gods do what they do. And so, while they believe that the gods are interested in justice, the idea that somehow the gods have to act with justice is not really in the picture; the gods do what they do. And so, this idea that Job's righteousness, which is indefinable in the ancient Near East, and God's doing justly are in the picture shows an Israelite way of thinking.

Another point that we see in the book is that Job is declared righteous right from the start. Wow, that's unlike anything in the ancient Near East that he would be declared clear. Again, that's one of the extremes of the book. You can see how that pulls all the ancient Near Eastern explanations off the table. If it exonerates Job right from the start, then all of the answers about Job's suffering are no longer available; all the ones that the ancient Near East gives.

### **9) Transcendent view of God [24:51-25:14]**

And finally, one more thing that shows us the Israelite focus in the book is the transcendent view of deity, that God kind of stays above it all. Now again, that could be mitigated depending on how you read that first chapter or two. And we'll talk about that further. But overall, there is a transcendent view of deity.

The book's answers do not hinge on human nature or divine nature, but on God's policies in the world. How does God work? And in that sense, again, it's very unlike what we find in the ancient Near East.

### **ANE Literature is Used as a Foil by the Friends Positions [25:14-26:32]**

The Book of Job, then I would say is not indebted to any piece of ancient Near Eastern literature. It uses the ancient Near Eastern literature as a foil. It wants you to think about it, while it wants its audience to think about the other answers that are given because it's going to show how bankrupt they are. The ancient Near East then is a conversation partner for the Book of Job. The Israelites are very well aware of that broader conversation. The book of Job is entering that conversation, but it's using that as a foil because it's going to take a different kind of position and give an answer that simply was not available in the ancient world, especially because of the way that people thought about the gods in the ancient world. Job's friends represent ancient Near Eastern thinking, but Job resists that, and the book resists it.

**Summary: Job is Distinctly Israelite [26:32-28:32]**

So, let's summarize the distinctly Israelite features. First of all, there is no great symbiosis. God doesn't have needs, and we see that expressed in a place like Job 22:3. Secondly, there's an interest in the justice of God. And again, that would not be as strong an element in the ancient Near East. There's an interest in righteousness as an abstract concept. Job seems to have a sense of personal righteousness that goes beyond what the ancient world could have provided. There are no ritual offenses considered or ritual remedies suggested or pursued, and no appeasement is pursued. Divine wisdom is a major theme and is really the focus of the book. And again, very much unlike what we find in the ancient Near East. In the ancient Near East, it was simply divine right. The gods do what they do. Here the idea of divine wisdom helps us to understand what God's running of the world is like and what his policies are like. Therefore, it helps to think of him differently than how the rest of the people in the ancient Near East thought about their gods.

So, Job is a book that's very much intertwined in the ancient world. It assumes a knowledge of the ancient world, but it takes an opposing viewpoint from what we find in the ancient world. In so doing, it gives us a revelation of God, of Yahweh, that's very different from anything that could have been given about one of the gods in the ancient world.

This is Dr. John Walton and his teaching on the Book of Job. This is session 5, Job and the Ancient Near East. [28:32]

## **The Book of Job**

### **Session 6: The Purpose of the Book of Job**

**By John Walton**

This is Dr. John Walton and this teaching on the Book of Job. This is session 6, The Purpose of the Book.

#### **Introduction [00:22-1:07]**

So, now we're getting to the really important issues. Let's talk about what is the purpose of the Book of Job. We've talked about how it has authority and inspired and gives us revelation of God. So, we've talked about its setting, its genre, date, and authorship issues, but now, what is the purpose of the book? The purpose is accomplished by the rhetorical strategy. The purpose is accomplished through the structure. But what do we find to be the purpose of the book?

When we talked about some of the misconceptions we could have, we talked about the idea that Job is not on trial. This is more about God than about Job, et cetera. So, let's give some specificity to that.

#### **Purpose [1:07-2:16]**

This book is to help us learn how to think well about God when disaster strikes. How do we think properly and appropriately about God when disaster strikes? I would like to suggest then that the purpose of the book is to explore God's policies. How does God work in the world?

We tend to think that if God is good and God is all-powerful, then he should be able to prevent suffering. And so, we wonder then what is God doing when we encounter suffering, especially suffering by people who seem totally undeserving. How do we think about God's policies? How does he work in the world? I would suggest to you that that's really what the book is to try to help us figure out. How does God work in the world, especially when we're suffering?

### **Challenger's Accusation: Not Good to Reward the Righteous [2:16-5:49]**

Now, the book is set up with two accusations being driven at God from different directions. We have the adversary in heaven, the antagonist, the challenger, sometimes referred to as the satan. We'll get to that in a little bit. That's another lecture, but let's call him "the challenger" for now. We've got the challenger, and when the challenger stands before God, God draws attention to Job. "Have you considered my servant Job? There's none like him." Again, the description of Job is extremely just and righteous, the best a person could be.

And remember that the challenger's question is: "Does Job serve God for nothing?" Now, this sounds like it's a question about Job's motivations, and that's sort of most directly what it is. What really motivates Job to be the kind of person that he is?

But inherent in that question, and I think the real focus of it has to do with how God works things, what God's policies are. So, really what the challenger is asking is: Is it a good policy, God, for you to bring prosperity to righteous people? It sounds logical enough but think about it. If righteous people keep receiving all sorts of benefits and prosperity and success and good health, benefits of every sort, because of their righteousness, aren't you really training them to be mercenaries? Aren't you really giving them an ulterior motive for being righteous? If you spend enough time giving benefits to righteous people, you end up training them to long for the benefits rather than to care about righteousness.

You train them to think differently. That different kind of thinking is actually subversive to true righteousness because the more the person decides they like the benefits, the less they will be thinking about true righteousness. You ought to rethink this, God. Is it a good policy to bring prosperity to righteous people? Is that really in your best interests and in the best interests of true righteousness? It corrupts a person's motivations, not a good policy.

Now, whatever we come to think about this challenger, we can see that this is a logical point to raise. It's a significant point. In fact, we could go back to Genesis 22 and



Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac and see the same kind of question being asked. We'll come back to that another time. So, one prong of the accusation against God, against God's policies, doesn't question God's nature; it questions his policies. So, one side of that is: Is it really good policy for righteous people to prosper?

**Job's Accusation: Not good for the righteous to suffer [5:49-6:47]**

Now, when Job's disasters strike and calamity besets him, we find that as he begins to interact with God, he's got a different challenge. His challenge is: "You know, God, is it really a good idea for you to let righteous people suffer? I mean, we're the good guys. We're on your side; we're on your team. Why is it that we suffer? This doesn't sound like a very good policy to allow righteous people to suffer."

And you can see the problem. The challenger is saying, "It's not a good policy for righteous people to prosper." Job is raising the point: "It's not good policy for righteous people to suffer." What's a God to do? What's left? How is it that God's supposed to act? What would be an appropriate policy?

**Book's Focus: How do you think about God when things go wrong? [6:47-7:58]**

Now we'd see the book. That's really what this book is trying to address. How do we think about God's policies when everything goes wrong? In that sense, the challenger is not accusing Job of wrong motives. He's saying we don't know. We don't know what Job's motives are because you have not, you, God, have not allowed that situation to unfold. He's apparently righteous. Everything seems to go well, but you've prospered him so much that we really don't know if he's truly righteous or not. The only way we can tell whether Job is righteous or not is to take away the benefits. It's a clear strategy and really obvious once you think of it. That's the only way to test. In that sense, again, the book is not about suffering. The book is about righteousness. What is the nature, what is the mettle of Job's righteousness?

**Conclusion: I'm God, you're not, power card [No] [7:58-8:40]**

Now, when we get to the end of the book, how the book resolves this, and we'll go into more detail on this later, but I'm going to lay the cards on the table. Some people

think that by the time you get to the end of the book, you've got a statement more along the line of "I'm God you're not." And with that comes the implication of, so mind your own business, or so I can do whatever I want, or you are worthless in comparison, or just shut up. You know, we get that impression somehow God is just pulling the power card. You know, I'm God, you're not.

**Conclusion: I'm God, trust me, trust card [Yes] ]8:40-9:24]**

And I don't think that really describes where the book lands. There is a sense of I'm God, and you are not, but not with those other implications. It's rather along the line of, "I am God who is supremely wise and powerful. And so, I want you to trust me, even when you don't understand." That's not the power card. That's a compassion card. That's a trust card. "I am God supremely wise and powerful. Trust me."

**Purpose: How does God work in this world? [9:24-11:00]**

The purpose of the book, then is to help us to think about God as trustworthy, and reliable, even in the most desperate times of life. That we shouldn't think that somehow his policies are questionable. It's easy to think that because when things are going wrong, we look for somebody to blame, and God's the easiest one to blame.

So, this idea of how does God work in the world? How do we understand our suffering so that we can feel comfortable trusting God? If we thought that he was the one that brought the suffering, it would be hard to trust him. And so, we have to learn how to think about how he's working in the world.

When God actually gives the answers to Job, when he talks about the situation to Job in the last chapters, he talks to us about how he works in the world. And so, that's what we're going to look at as we kind of talk about the book in this large frame of its purpose.

How to think about God's policies and to think well of God, to think appropriately about God when disaster strikes.

This is Dr. John Walton and his teaching on the book of Job. This is session 6, The Purpose of the Book. [11:00]

**The Book of Job**  
**Session 7: Theological Foundation of the Book of Job,**  
**Retribution Principle Triangle**

**By John Walton**

This is Dr. John Walton and his teaching on the Book of Job. This is session 7, Theological Foundation of the Book of Job, Retribution Principle Triangle.

**Introduction to the Retribution Principle [00:26-2:46]**

Before we move on to the book itself, we need to expand on the purpose of the book to talk about some of the theological foundations of the book. In that way, we're moving beyond the idea in the ancient world of the great symbiosis specifically to talk about what's called the retribution principle. The retribution principle is basically the idea that the righteous will prosper and the wicked will suffer. Basically, people get what they deserve. When I say the righteous, the observant, the faithful, substitute any of those words, and they'll prosper. Well, that could be, you know, good health, success, their crops grow, whatever it might be, happy families. And the wicked are those who are not faithful, not righteous, not upright, they will suffer again, whether that's a disaster at one level or another. So, it's just a way to talk about this idea that people get what they deserve. The righteous will prosper; the wicked will suffer. We call it the retribution principle.

Now it's, of course, common for people to believe that their circumstances in life somehow reflect that they are in favor with God or the gods or out of favor. And that they've done something that has brought the circumstances upon them. Again, whether it be evil or whether it be good. That they're in favor or out of favor, and that reflects itself in their circumstances, it was recognized in the ancient Near East about people thought that way. And it's likewise very common for people to think that way today, that their circumstances reflect being in favor or out of favor.

We even talk very casually when something goes well, "Oh, I must've done something right." Or "What did I do to earn this?" when things go badly. So, it's this retribution principle that is at the foundation of the Book of Job.

### **Retribution Principle in Job [2:46-4:06]**

In fact, the Book of Job puts the retribution principle under the microscope because Job and his friends all believe very firmly in the retribution principle. That's really part of the problem. They see the retribution principle; not only do you assume that if someone is righteous, they will prosper, and if someone is wicked, they will suffer, but they also turn that around. If someone is suffering, they must be wicked. If someone is prospering, they must have done something right. And so, when Job's circumstances turn so dramatically, so tragically, we know what conclusion everyone is going to draw. They'll decide he must've done something really, really bad to bring this kind of disaster, to go from the heights to the depths. This goes back to the extremes that we talked about earlier. Job is at the highest height of humanity, and he goes to the lowest depths of suffering. Those extremes are important so that we can really think about the retribution principle with a clear mind.

### **The Challenger and the Retribution Principle [4:06-5:53]**

So, the Book of Job looks at this retribution principle. After all, remember the Challenger's question, does Job serve God for nothing? How's the retribution principle play into all of this? In the retribution principle, there's an attempt to understand what God is doing in the world, to articulate it, to justify it, to systematize the logic of how God is working in the world, that God is working a justice system. You do good; you get good. You do bad; bad things happen. So, the retribution principle assumes an understanding of how God works in the world. It's an attempt to sort of quantify it or systematize it.

The Challenger's claim is that the retribution principle bringing benefits, and prosperity to righteous people is detrimental to the development of true righteousness

because it sets up this ulterior motive, the anticipation of gain, doing it for what you get out of it. So, the Challenger is focusing attention on the retribution principle as to whether that truly is part of God's policies. And Job's claim, if the retribution principle is not enforced, if righteous people suffer, well, then God's justice becomes suspect. So, you can see that in the two prongs of accusation that we've talked about in the book, the retribution principle is central to the conversation.

### **Retribution Triangle of Claims [5:53-7:12]**

Now we can understand this a little better if you can imagine a triangle. I call it the triangle of claims. And at one lower corner of the triangle, you have the retribution principle; at the other lower corner of the triangle, you have Job's righteousness. And at the top of the triangle, the third corner, you have God's justice.

Now, as long as Job is prospering, that triangle holds very conveniently, very comfortably. God is doing justice. Job is righteous, the retribution principle is true, and everything's happy. But When Job begins suffering, we look at that triangle, and something's got to go. You can't hold on to all three corners: to God doing justice, to Job being righteous, and to the retribution principle. You can't hold on to all three. Something's got to give. And as the book unfolds, we discover who is going to give up what. It's really an interesting way to think about the book.

### **Job's Friends and the Retribution Triangle of Claims [7:12-8:24]**

Start with Job's friends, for instance. Job's friends, I'll use the idea of building their fort in that corner. They choose the retribution principle corner of the triangle, and they build their fort there. Over and over and over again in their speeches, they affirm the retribution principle. They apply it to the situation. They use it as part of the argumentation. They are champions of the retribution principle. So, there they build their fort. They're going to defend that.

From that vantage point, they look out to the other two corners of the triangle; which one's going to go? Are they going to say, well, God really isn't working in justice, or are they going to say Job isn't really righteous?

Well, we know where they go. They're very happy to affirm that God is working justly. And so, with the retribution principle true and God not being under scrutiny, of course, the problem is Job. He must not be as righteous as he seemed to us, not as righteous as he seemed to everyone from the outside. And certainly, he is not as righteous as he seems to think he is. The problem is Job. So, they build their fort in the retribution principle corner, and they give up on Job's corner. That's the one that's got to go.

### **Job and the Retribution Triangle of Claims [8:24-9:57]**

When we think about Job and his perspective, of course, it's very different. It's very clear where he builds his fort. He builds his fort in his own corner. His righteousness is unassailable in his mind. But, of course, that creates a little bit of awkwardness because now he's got to look out and which one are you going to give up? Is he going to give up the retribution principle, or is he going to give up the idea that God acts justly? It's a conundrum for poor Job. But what we find is over and over again, he affirms the retribution principle. He tries to find a weakness in it, but he really can't. And so he turns his eyes toward God. And as Job's speeches continue through the book, it becomes more and more accusing of God; it becomes more and more doubtful, skeptical about God and whether he does justice at all. So, Job builds his fort in his own corner, and he's giving up God's corner as he holds onto the retribution principle.

### **Elihu and the Retribution Triangle of Claims [9:57-14:59]**

Now, besides the three friends that come in all through the dialogue section, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, we have a fourth character, Elihu. It doesn't come in until the second discourse toward the end of the book. But Elihu is still engaged in the triangle. Elihu builds his fort at the top of the triangle of God's justice. Now, at that point, you say, okay, so what's Elihu going to give up? Is he going to give up the retribution principle, or, like Job's other friends, is he going to question Job's righteousness?

Some people have read the book and thought that Elihu really isn't much different than the other friends. But I disagree with that strongly. Elihu positions himself

differently on the triangle and comes to the conclusion that the friends aren't even close to him.

So, when we ask the question, which of the other two corners does Elihu give up? We find that, well, he cheats; he's clever. What he does is he look at the retribution principle, and he says the retribution principle is true, but I think we've got it wrong. We have to renounce it and expand it. See, most people thought of the retribution principle as you've done bad things in the past, so now bad things are happening to you. So, your circumstances are a response to past behavior. Elihu comes along and says, maybe it's more complex than that. That way of looking at the retribution principle makes it remedial, fixing, addressing, and responding to what's gone wrong.

What if we think of the retribution principle as more preventative. Here's how it would look. It's not so much something you did in the past that's causing negative consequences, it's something that you are just ready to get involved in that you're on the brink of this kind of behavior that it's supposed to kind of turn you away from it. And so, the retribution principle could be a response to, kind of, present developing things instead of things in the past.

Now, what that does, it means that, unlike the friends, he doesn't have to find unrighteousness in Job's past. Instead, now he looks at Job differently. And he says, "So here's the problem Job. Here's what is the reason for your suffering? Look at your self-righteousness, your willingness to vindicate yourself, justify yourself, at the expense of God." He says, "The problem is not what you did before your suffering began. The problem has become evident in how you have responded once the suffering started. The problem, then Job, is what is very evident, your self-righteous behavior."

That's why I say he cheated. He redefined terms. And in redefining them, it gave him an alternative that the other friends never thought of, and Job himself is less in a position to defend himself. Even as he continues to affirm his righteousness, his self-righteousness becomes very evident, and his willingness to accuse God.



So, Elihu has built his fort on God acting justly. And in the process, he's held onto the retribution principle, though he's redefined it. And that has given him a different sort of attack against Job's righteousness. Elihu is more right than any of the other human characters in the book. He gets closest. He transcends what the friends think, and he really sees Job more realistically, more appropriately.

The problem with Elihu is that even though he's closer to the truth than anyone else, he's got his own problems. And, in the end, he's still making the retribution principle the basis for understanding how things work. He just redefines it. And as we go through the book, we're going to get to Elihu's part, and we'll evaluate that more closely.

### **Retribution Triangle of Claims Attempted Resolutions [14:59-15:18]**

So, we've got our triangle, the triangle of claims, how different parties kind of pick up different positions, and how to view the scenario of the book from those different positions. Now we will try to resolve some of these tensions. How did people resolve the tension of the retribution principle? After all, most people, at some time or another, come to experience life in such a way that the retribution principle looks suspect to them. Then how are those tensions resolved?

One way is to come to some qualifications regarding the nature of God. This is certainly what they did in the ancient Near East. They had no confidence that God was acting justly. They believed the retribution principle, but they really didn't have a triangle tightly pieced together. They just had compromised on the nature of God.

Other times people might compromise or qualify regarding the purpose of suffering. Some people talk about suffering as educational--character building. Maybe even to talk about it as participation with Christ in his sufferings. And so, they end up qualifying the purpose of suffering. That kind of resolves some tensions in the retribution principle.

### **Retribution Triangle of Claims Elsewhere in the Bible: Timing [15:18-18:02]**

In the biblical texts, some people will resolve the tension; the Psalmist sometimes, for instance, resolves the tension by thinking about timing.

The Psalmist says, you know, in the Lament Psalms, most of the times, they're lamenting in the context of retribution principle. Their enemies are triumphing over them. And why should that happen? The enemy is the bad guy. I'm the good guy. Why is this happening? And so that question about the retribution principle is underlying many of the Lament Psalms. And lots of times, a Psalm is treated in terms of timing. Eventually, things are going to smooth out. You know, God will in his appropriate time, act against the enemy and restore the Psalmist.

So, at times, of course, Christian theology even goes further that maybe things are bad now, but we've got eternity. We've got eternity with God, an eternity in heaven. And so, things will be fine. And on the scale of eternity, the small things we suffer now are minor. So, some people qualify the retribution principle with the extended time concept.

### **Justice and the World as a Solution [18:02-19:07]**

Some people qualify the retribution principle with regard to the role of justice in the world. You can talk about the world not being just, even if you still talk about God acting justly. That is that in this world, non-order continues. We view the idea that justice is not the sole foundation of how God works in the world. That doesn't compromise him. But the question is, has he made the world conform to his own justice? And we know that he hasn't because we're sinful people, and yet we still exist. If the world fully conformed to God's justice, it wouldn't be a world that we could live in. And so, given a fallen world, perfect justice is not attainable.

### **God's Complex of Attributes [19:07-20:47]**

The basis for God's operation in the world is his entire character, his entire range of attributes, not just one attribute or another. You can say that God is love, and

that covers everything. No, it doesn't. He's lots of other things too. So, the one way to qualify the retribution principle without somehow being detrimental to the character of God has to understand that God and his world are different and that he has not imposed justice on it.

God, in his wisdom, is concerned with justice. But that's all given the parameters of an imperfect world, a fallen world, and even a not yet fully ordered world; God has brought order into a world of non-order, and disorder, sin has also come into the picture. But we're not living in a perfectly ordered world. And therefore, it's not one that reflects God's attributes throughout.

There are affirmations that we find of the retribution principle. And we find them in Psalms, especially wisdom Psalms. We find them in Proverbs. These affirmations are not intended to be a full theological description of how the world works according to God's attributes and his doing justice. They are proverbial in nature.

### **Retribution Principle Not a Theology Solution [20:47-23:08]**

The retribution principle needs to be understood by us as proverbial in nature. That means it's how things often act but not how things always work. It's not a guarantee. It's not a promise. The retribution principle does not function well to offer an explanation of suffering and evil in the world. The technical term for that is theodicy explaining why there's suffering and evil in the world. The retribution principle does not offer a theodicy. The retribution principle is not an explanation of how God operates at all times in all places in the world.

It is an affirmation, in part, of who God is. That is, God delights in bringing good things to his faithful servants. And God takes seriously punishing wicked people, but he doesn't carry those things out throughout because, again, it's a fallen world, and none of us could live through that. It tells us, though, about the identity of God, about the heart of God. And his identity and his character are bound to have ramifications in the world--ripple effects. And that's why sometimes it looks to us like the retribution principle is working out sometimes. Indeed, it is. But we shouldn't expect it to work out

all the time in every circumstance. So, we have the theology; this is what God is like standing against the theodicy; this explains life as we experience it. They're contrasting positions. And the Book of Job performs some radical surgery to separate those two so that we don't make the mistake of thinking that theology leads to a theodicy.

### **God Needs No Defense [23:08-24:18]**

Yahweh's justice must be taken on faith rather than worked out philosophically on a moment-by-moment analysis of our experiences. He does not need to be defended. In one sense, theodicy, our attempts at theodicy, are a bit of an insult to God. He doesn't need our defense, and we're really not in a position to defend him very ably. He doesn't need to be defended. He wants to be trusted. The entire constellation of God's attributes is at work in a complex, coordinated manner. We can never tell when God is going to choose justice or when he's going to choose mercy. We can never tell where his compassion might override something that he ought to be doing. Justice is a part of that constellation but doesn't trump all the other attributes that God has.

### **Jesus Shifting from Cause to Purpose, Theodicy to Theology [24:18-27:59]**

Here's a way that can help us sort this out. In the New Testament, Jesus is confronted and challenged with retribution principle questions. In John 9, the man born blind, the disciples see a great opportunity. Here's this man who was born blind. And the question they posed to Jesus is the retribution principle question. "Who sinned, this man or his parents." See, this is a great conundrum because if it's, how could it have been the man who sinned because he was born this way? And if it were his parents, how come the man suffers for it? And so, this is just the key point. And they were probably, you know, really excited because now they're going to get an answer to the question of the ages because Jesus stands in front of them. And so, they say, "Who sinned, this man or his parents?" Now you can see that their question is a theodicy question. What explanation is going to account for this man's suffering? So, when they ask a question of cause, it's a theodicy question and kind of moves toward an expanded theology, which is what Jesus

does. Jesus turns them away from the theodicy to the theology. Isn't it intriguing that he says, "Neither this man nor his parents," by that time, the disciples have stopped kind of excitedly. And now they're going, "Oh no, he's doing it again." He's doing it again; he's not going to answer the question we asked; he's going to answer the question we should have asked. He says, "It neither was this man nor his parents, but that the son of God might be glorified."

Now it's really an interesting question because what he does is basically say, don't look to the past and ask the question about cause; you're not getting that answer. Instead, what Jesus answers, Jesus doesn't give them a cause. He doesn't give him an explanation of the past. But he says what you should do is turn your attention to the future and look for purpose. The glory of God is a purpose. It's not a cause. It's not a reason. And so, Jesus turns their attention away from the past and away from cause to look at purpose. No explanation of the suffering is forthcoming. None is possible; none is necessary.

We have to trust God's wisdom and seek out his purpose. So, Jesus gives that same kind of answer. And it's the same answer that Job ends up getting. Trust God's wisdom and seek out his purpose. Don't expect to get explanations of the cause. It's not about reasons.

### **Jesus and Luke 13 Falling Tower [cause to purpose shift] [27:59-29:52]**

Jesus is, again, confronted with this in Luke chapter 13, verses one through five. Here he is asked, what about this tower that collapsed on people while they're there for a festival? How do you explain this sort of random-looking disaster? And again, Jesus turns their attention away from the cause. That has nothing to do with who was righteous and who was wicked. He states that a one-to-one correspondence between sin and punishment should not be made, but rather, he encourages them to view the incident as a warning. He refuses to engage the question of cause and directs the attention of his audience to the purpose of such incidents, give us warning.

They exhort us to think, in different terms, to think of how life can end so quickly, to think about how suffering can come. It's not about a one-to-one correspondence.

So, we see that when Jesus addresses the retribution principle issues that he's confronted with, he consistently turns away from giving reasons or explanations for cause. And that's a large part of what the Book of Job is going to do as we begin to adjust our expectations as we think about our own experiences in the world.

We're now ready to get into the Book of Job itself, section by section. And we'll begin that in the next portion.

This is Dr. John Walton and his teaching on the Book of Job. This is session 7, Theological Foundation of the Book of Job, Retribution Principle Triangle. [29:52]

**The Book of Job**  
**Session 8: Scene on Earth**  
**By John Walton**

This is Dr. John Walton and his teaching on the Book of Job. This is session 8, Scene on Earth.

**Introduction: Job 1:1-5, the Land of Uz [00:22-1:26]**

So, now we're ready to get into the actual Book of Job. We've talked all about it. We've talked about a lot of aspects of it, and now we're ready to talk about the content of the book itself. In this segment, we're going to be dealing just with the scene on earth, the first five verses of the book. And so, we're introduced to Job as someone from the land of Uz. That means that he's a foreigner and he's from some obscure, mysterious place, barely on the perimeter of the known world for an ancient Israelite audience. So, he's from this mysterious desert region, a region of the Syrian desert, perhaps associated with Edom. It's an area known for its wisdom.

His friends are also from that region. So, for instance, we have a Temanite. So, he's from Teman. So, it's that region that's to the south and east of the land of Israel.

Genesis 36 connects Uz with Esau, and again that places things in that region. The earliest interpretation of the book of Job, which is found in the Septuagint, locates Uz between Idumea and Arabia. So again, basically, that region. So, as we've mentioned, Job is not an Israelite; he's an outsider in that regard, even though the book deals with Israelite issues and is addressed to an Israelite audience.

**Job's Character and Actions in the Extreme [1:26-3:58]**

We find in the description of Job himself everything is painted in extremes. So, Job is blameless. The Hebrew word is *tam*, and he's upright, *yashar*. These refer respectively to his character and his actions. And so, here is the person who is just faithful in every way. He's a man of integrity. There is no blame associated with him or guilt. He's someone who behaves according to God's expectations and enjoys God's favor. If we looked for words opposite to describe Job, we would look for words like

someone who is proclaimed guilty or to be considered wicked, that is standing under condemnation. Job is not those things. The words that describe him are the opposites of those.

At the same time, these are not words of sinless perfection. Job is not in the divine realm in terms of his behavior, but it's the best that a person can be, the best that a human can be.

He fears God, the word for God here is Elohim, not Yahweh. So, he fears Elohim. That means he takes him seriously based on what is known of him. We have other people kind of outside Israel described that way. For instance, the sailors in the Book of Jonah are described as fearing God. And that's based on what little they know of him. Even in the book of Genesis, Abimelech is described that way in contrast to Abraham, who has a personal relationship with Yahweh. So, all of these terms portrayed Job in the highest possible standing. And again, we've mentioned the use of extremes to describe things.

### **Job's Possessions in the Extreme [3:58-4:46]**

Now his possessions and his status are also in the ideal realm. They're not necessarily contrived, but everything's immense. So, these are stereotypes of how many cattle, how many camels, how many sheep and goats, everything is portrayed in ideal terms. He has achieved success and prosperity by the highest possible standards. And so, again, in that way, we have extremes portrayed. Just because they're extremes doesn't mean they're not true or accurate, of course. But we have to notice that the extremes are very important so that they move those easy answers off the table. So, here we have then the description of Job.

### **Job's Piety: ritual practices [4:46-6:24]**

Now, what is arguably the most intriguing of these issues is the question of his piety. In verses four and five, a scene is described for us when his sons and daughters would gather for, apparently, birthday parties, or banquets of some sort. Job would have



this ritual that he performed afterward. It's a setting that addresses that there is just the outside possibility that some offense had been committed. If we read the verses, it says, "His sons used to hold feasts in their homes on their birthdays. And they would invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. When a period of feasting had run its course, Job would make arrangements for them to be purified. Early in the morning, he would sacrifice a burnt offering for each of them, thinking, 'Perhaps my children have sinned and cursed God in their hearts.' This was Job's regular custom." So, we find this practice. It's also in the banquet setting that they eventually meet their demise in chapter one, verses 18 and 19. They are actually banqueting when the house collapses on them and the fire, and they lose their lives. Job is worried that they perhaps cursed God in their hearts.

### **Children cursing "In their hearts" [6:24-7:07]**

Now this "in their hearts" idea, when you use that to apply to an individual, it refers to private thoughts, but this is not about them as individuals. It's about their corporate get-togethers, their banqueting. When a group of people is part of the scene, it can refer to corporate thinking or shared confidentially. And we find places in Deuteronomy like Deuteronomy 8:17, 18:21, and likewise, Psalm 78:18, where this idea of "in their hearts" is a corporate conversation taking place.

### **Curse/bless God [7:07-10:59]**

Also, when it says "cursed God in their hearts," it doesn't use the Hebrew word for "curse." It uses the Hebrew word for "bless." And so, this is a euphemistic use of "bless." To put the word "curse" and God next to each other was considered in bad taste. And so, they used blessed God. So, this actually says that perhaps "they have blessed God in their hearts." Now this is just the first of a good deal of interplay between blessing and cursing in these early chapters of Job. So, in 1.11, also in 2.5 the Challenger is suggested Job will bless, that is, curse God to his face, in contrast to the fears Job had, that his children might bless or curse God in their hearts. Instead, Job truly does bless

God, not curse God, although it's the same verb that the Challenger had suggested. Job's wife urges him to curse God; again, the verb is to bless/to curse God blatantly and die in chapter two, verse nine. Job does not respond with blessing God after that second round, but neither does he curse God. Instead, he curses the day of his birth. We find that in chapter three. Beyond this specific use of terms in establishing a literary motif, the underlying narrative framework should also be considered as we think about how these words work. In the narrative, remember God has blessed Job with children and possessions in chapter one, verse 10. Not only that, but God has orally blessed Job by praising him to the Challenger. Sometimes a blessing is accomplished by praise. The nature of that oral blessing, God blessing Job in front of the Challenger, becomes a curse in a sense as it was made the basis for the challenge that leads to the loss of Job's material prosperity.

Eventually, of course, God restores that material blessing as we get toward the end of the book. So, the curse-bless antithesis stands as a significant element of a motif in the book. Now, what exactly would be entailed in cursing God? What would that look like? Cursing God can be thought of in a variety of ways. Using God's name and a frivolous oath would be one way. Using God's name along with elicit words of power. So, a hex or something of that sort. Using words of power against a God, in something like an incantation. Even speaking in a denigrating, contemptuous or slanderous way about God, basically insulting God. Holding God in contempt by stating implicitly or explicitly that God is powerless to act, or that God is corrupt in his actions or motives, that God has needs, or that God can be manipulated making God less than God.

Now, Job arguably does some of these in his accusations against God, but he's expressing anger, not contempt. And he still maintains the integrity, as we'll talk about later. Perhaps it's best to think of cursing God as involving contemptuous renunciation, disavowing, neglect the proper honors. And, of course, Job did not do that.

### **Job's Ritual Behaviors, God as Petty [10:59-14:52]**

Most important in this whole scene is to try to understand Job's ritual behavior. What Job does is not so much indicative of what he thinks about his children but rather what he thinks about God. What does this scene in verses one through five tell us about what Job thought about God? Job is considering the possibility that unguarded statements by his sons and daughters might be made in the context of the banquet and that God would take offense at such unguarded, not very complimentary statements.

Despite perhaps even the innocent intentions of the speaker, we know that this was considered a real possibility in the ancient world. We have an Assyrian piece called a Prayer to Every God. And in it, the worshiper is very worried he apparently is suffering some negative experiences. This prayer is trying to work toward a solution. He says, "if I've inadvertently stepped on a place that's holy to my god or to my goddess or to a god that I don't know, or to a goddess that I don't know. If I maybe have pronounced a word that is offensive to my god or to my goddess or true god that I don't know, or a goddess that I don't know." And he goes through this whole checklist of things he might have inadvertently done that might have offended his god or his goddess or the god he doesn't know or the goddess he doesn't know.

We can see then that a prayer like this is an expression of the idea that the gods can be pretty petty. They can be demanding things that human beings would have no way to know about. Job's character and behavior are above reproach. But in my understanding, these two verses about Job's ritual piety suggest that his view of God may be flawed. It suggests that he may be thinking of God as petty.

It's that kind of expression that opens the path for the challenge against him by the Challenger. If Job is inclined to think of God as petty, he may well be ready to think that, that it's really all about benefits and that it's not about righteousness per se. It's about trying to please an easily offended God.

So, I'm inclined to think that verses four and five in chapter one are not actually part of the positive characterizations of Job. It actually shows where the weakness in his

armor might be that already he's thinking about God as petty. And the fact is, in his speeches, that's going to come back, and he's going to express those things more straightforwardly.

### **Summary of Job 1:1-5 [14:52-15:19]**

So, in verses one through four, we have a setup for the narrative to continue. We've learned about Job being above reproach. We've also learned that there's a chink in his armor, and that can be exploited. We'll find out more about that when the scene in heaven opens.

This is Dr. John Walton and his teaching on the Book of Job. This is session 8, Scene on Earth. [15:19]

## **The Book of Job**

### **Session 9: Scene in Heaven, Part 1**

**By John Walton**

This is Dr. John Walton and his teaching on the Book of Job. This is session 9, Scene in Heaven. Part 1.

#### **Heavenly Council [00:23-1:36]**

Now the scene in the Book of Job switches to the heavenly court. It's audience day. Yahweh is holding an audience, and his divine council is assembled. The sons of God, who are the council members, come before him to make their reports. When council members make reports, that's not to suggest somehow that God is less than omniscient; it's just that God has chosen to work with the council. We find that picture in the Bible in a number of places 1 Kings 22, here in Job, Isaiah 6, "Whom shall I send, who will go for us?" Psalm 82, and numerous other places. This is the way it presents God's workings.

These are not other gods, like they are in some of the other ancient cultures, as they think about a divine council, yet God has chosen to work through a council. God doesn't need other beings. He doesn't need anyone to counsel him, but if he chooses to work that way, that's his business.

#### **The Character of hasatan [1:36-5:23]**

So, the sons of God have gathered, and Satan is among them. Now, if we said that way, it confuses us a bit because we're used to thinking of Satan as the bad guy, the devil; who doesn't belong, even in heaven, let alone among the sons of God. So, let's be careful here. This character comes. Who is he? The text is one step away from talking about him as Satan.

I know most translations render Satan with a capital S and immediately make us think about a personal name connected to the devil. But here the Hebrew text is not presented as a personal name. It puts a definite article on it. In Hebrew, that's "ha." So, it's hasatan. Satan is a Hebrew word. You didn't know, and you knew some Hebrew. So, this

is hasatan, the satan. Now that means it's not a personal name. And that really means we shouldn't be capitalizing it, to be fair. I mean, we shouldn't. But it rather describes a role. Satan, as I mentioned, is a Hebrew word. And it's a word that can function as a verb as well as a noun. And we need to look at how that word works.

When it's a verb, it suggests that there's some opposing, being an adversary, challenging someone, all of those kinds of things. It can be carried out by human beings, that is, by other kings who challenge Solomon, for instance. It can be done by people in a court setting, a prosecuting attorney. It can even be done by the angel of the Lord who challenges a Balaam's movement in Numbers. 22, stands in his way as satan. So, there's nothing intrinsically evil about this role. We find human beings in this role. We also find non-human beings like the angel of the Lord that I mentioned, who carries out this function in that particular passage.

And, of course, here in Job is this particular character. But this character, this challenger, and that's the term I will prefer; this challenger is among the sons of God. He's in the divine council. He's not portrayed as the devil.

In fact, in the Old Testament, the use of satan does not suggest the devil. It's only applied to a non-human being, such as in this case in a couple of other instances. One of them is in Zechariah chapter three, in which he opposes, he challenges the right of the high priest to be restored. That's an appropriate challenge. God does rebuke him and offers his own direction as to why that can take place. In 1 Chronicles 21, it refers to Satan, who incites David to take a census. And so, we have just these couple occurrences, hardly enough to build a profile.

### **The Challenger [5:23-6:15]**

But here he is among the heavenly counsel, the sons of God. The idea that it refers to someone who challenges, no matter what the context, whether for good or ill, whether among humans or among the heavenly host, it's someone who challenges, who takes an adversarial position, fits the profile of what we find with the word.

It does not become a personal name for the devil until we're well out of the Old Testament period. In the pseudepigraphal literature, that literature kind of in the second temple period between the testaments and beyond, it refers to many satans, not just one. It's not a personal name for the devil.

### **The Challenger as God's Agent [6:15-8:36]**

Here in Job the hasatan, the Challenger, is God's agent. He's been sent out with a task. He's coming back to report. He's doing God's will and God's bidding. He is God's agent.

Now, how is he a challenger? Well, here we find that he challenges God's policies. We've already talked about this. He does so appropriately. That is, it's true that if righteous people continue to receive benefits, it may subvert their righteousness and give them an ulterior motive. That's true. That's not some false hyped-up accusation.

And so, we find that this agent of God's is doing the job God has given him to do. Job is not his target. God's the one that brought up Job. The target of his challenge is God's policies. Job is simply a logical test case because he is the ultimate upright person. So, in that sense, we don't have to think of the Challenger as playing a devil type of role. He is not tempting. He's not possessing. He is not lying. There's no diabolical chuckle as he ruins Job. In fact, he only acts on God's behalf. God gives him freedom of hand, and God accepts responsibility for ruining Job. No one in the rest of the story ever imagines that there's some other agent involved in Job's ruin. It's God who has done it. God is being held accountable by Job. God is seen as responsible. God has struck Job as much as the Challenger has.

### **Challenger not Portrayed as Evil [8:36-10:11]**

And it's interesting that sometimes we think about, when we consider the Challenger to be the devil, we think about him as taking great delight and ruining Job. Whereas God, very sadly, experiences it. The text doesn't differentiate in how they each respond. Neither character lacks a particularly or has a particularly sympathetic response.

Whatever the Challenger does, he does through the power of God. And God says that. "You have incited me to ruin him," chapter 2. Nothing intrinsically evil emerges in the author's portrayal of the Challenger. He is a neutral character doing what it's his job to do. Again, no tempting, no corrupting, no depraving. This is not a devil profile. This is an independent profile that we have to derive from the text itself. The fact that the angel of the Lord himself can perform the role of satan suggests that it's not intrinsically evil.

### **Challenger as a Literary Construct [10:11-11:27]**

The Challenger is a character used by the author in ways that correspond to what was known by an Israelite audience. Remember, we've talked about this being a literary construct, and therefore all of the characters are just that, they are literary characters, playing a role, regardless of whether this is truly the being that the New Testament designates as the devil. The book of Job needs to be interpreted based on the profile that was available to the target audience as Israelites, not a later Greco-Roman audience--New Testament.

The Challenger, in actuality, is of very little theological significance in the book. He just helps set the scene as he questions Job's motives and challenges God's policies. He's not offered as the one who can be blamed for Job's suffering. The book certainly is not suggesting that we ought to look for blame in the devil when we are suffering; that is not the teaching of the book.

### **Challenger as Minor Character in the Book [11:27-12:30]**

His role does not provide an explanation for suffering or evil in our experiences or in the world. He's a minor character playing a small part in the unfolding drama. And we give him too much attention at our peril because it distorts the message of the book. This is a heavenly functionary playing his assigned role to bring challenge into the courts of God. That's what he's doing. He does it well. It sets a scene for the book.

And so, we proceed to discover whether Job's righteousness will stand the test. Remember, suffering is the only way to test the mettle of Job's righteousness. And so, suffering is a path that the book is going to take.



This is Dr. John Walton and his teaching on the Book of Job. This is session 9, Scene in Heaven, Part 1. [12:30]

**The Book of Job**  
**Session 10: Sons of God and Satan**  
**By John Walton**

This is Dr. John Walton and his teaching on the Book of Job. This is session 10, Sons of God and Satan.

**Challenger's Report [00:23-1:03]**

So, the famous scene unfolds in the heavenly courts. God calls on the Challenger to make his report. What have you found? Again, this is simply the conversation that opens up the situation for us. It's not somehow an expression of God who doesn't know what's going on. He has tasked the Challenger to go and discover things and bring them. And so, the Challenger's playing the assigned role, and God is gathering information. That's what any good king would do. So, it's painting this situation in those terms.

**Disinterested Righteousness Question [1:03-2:27]**

The Challenger brings the case then as we've noted before. Great, look at what you've done for Job. You've given him all of this. And he says that you've put a hedge around him and his household, everything that he has. You've blessed the work of his hands so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land. But yeah, you've made it pretty easy for him; but does Job serve God for nothing? We've raised this already. This is the case of disinterested righteousness, that is, righteousness without self-interest. Does Job serve God for nothing? This challenge strikes right at the heart of the retribution principle and the great symbiosis, the terms that we've talked about. And the book's going to end up being a corrective for all of this.

**Will Job "curse" [barak] God? [2:27-3:52]**

So, we have this challenge: How will Job respond to suffering? Remember that we've talked about Job then as the star witness for the defense, the defense of God's

policies. How he responds will be important for determining whether blessing righteous people is an acceptable policy.

Now, the Challenger suggests that Job will curse God to his face. We've talked about this terminology before bless and curse every place in Job 1 and 2, where the text talks about cursing God in translations; the Hebrew word that's used is the Hebrew verb "barak," which means to bless. So again, in these contexts, in chapter one, verse 5, verse 11, chapter two, verses 5 and 9 in those contexts barak, which means blessed, is being used euphemistically to refer to curse. And it's translated as "blessed" in chapter one, verse 10, and verse 21. This use of euphemism produces an odd juxtaposition since the Challenger claims that Job will barak God to his face, meaning curse, yet in contrast, Job baraks God, meaning bless in 1.21. And so, it creates a very interesting kind of play on words as we work through the passage. And the decision of whether barak is a euphemism or whether it actually means "blessed" depends on the context of the sentence.

### **Extremes Disasters 3:52-4:35]**

Now, of course, once the Challenger has been given a free hand, there's a resulting tragedy. There are human foes. There is divine judgment from heaven. There is what could be called a natural disaster, all in rapid succession. Again, the fact that all areas are covered that all of them bring absolute disaster. "Only, I have escaped" that they come in rapid succession is all part of the extreme picture. Everything's got to be sudden and total for the whole picture of the book to work out.

### **Job's Response [4:35-5:50]**

In contrast, we look at Job's responses. First of all, he engages in the common acts of mourning. And so we have that described for us. Prostration is a response to something remarkable that God has done and represents acknowledgment and acceptance. And so, Job prostrates himself before God. Notice again and he considers this an act of God, not an independent act of some evil agent. He ends his speech with the

invocation of blessing on the name of God. "Naked, I came from my mother's womb, naked, I will depart. Yahweh has given, Yahweh has taken away. May the name of Yahweh be praised."

It's interesting that it uses the name of Yahweh here in Job's mouth, yet through all the speeches and all the discourses, Yahweh is never used until we get to Yahweh's speeches in chapter 38. Job always refers to God as El or Elohim or El Shaddai, never Yahweh, except here in the prologue and then in the Yahweh's speeches.

### **Blessing/Curse Play on the Word Barak [5:50-7:20]**

The Challenger said that he would curse the name of God. Job's speech ends with blessing of the name of God. But it's exactly what the Challenger said he would do and yet exactly the opposite. The challenge is that he would barak, and he baraks. So it's the same as what the Challenger said, but it's the opposite. Okay? Because the Challenger was using it as a euphemism, Job does bless God to his face, but with no euphemistic connotation. Job is not calling God to accountability. Whether God gives or takes away, he should be praised. God owes us nothing.

Now this is an admirable and commendable response. We'll find, of course, that Job doesn't manage to maintain this kind of pure response throughout the book. But it's easier at the beginning than it is as time goes on. I think many of us find it this way. When we face extended difficult situations, it's a little easier to be strong at the beginning, but things deteriorate as time goes on. The book tells us "that in all this Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing." Yet he considered God to be the one who had done it, but he's not seeking to hold God accountable.

### **Hidden Information: Heavenly Scene [7:20-9:39]**

Now in the rhetorical strategy of the book, how does this first scene in heaven work? Well, first of all, it does indicate to us that Job is indeed innocent of wrongdoing. It eliminates then the usual answers of the ancient Near East, as I've mentioned earlier. It makes room for some new solutions to think differently about the situation. Again, all the

extremes create that room for consideration. Again, it shows us the Job is not on trial. The scene in heaven targets God's policies. Job is just the test case.

We also find that the scene in heaven introduces the concept of hidden information. Remember that neither Job, nor his friends, will ever learn about this scene in heaven. They'll never be told what took place. They'll never have any explanation of what instituted all of this. They will never know. And so, in that case, Job is not offered reasons or answers or explanations of any sort. And so, we already see how hidden information is going to play into the book. We note that God both initiated the conversation and approved the course of action. He takes responsibility for it. And so, again, we find that the Challenger is simply a catalyst simply, narratively speaking, to this particular set of circumstances that unfolds.

The scene in heaven itself is removed from Job's knowledge. And therefore, is not there to give us as readers a behind-the-scenes reason by which we can ourselves hold God accountable or evaluate him. It's, rather, pulling all of those things out of the picture so that we can discuss this whole idea of how it is that we think about God.

### **God's Policies Cannot Be Reduced to an Equation [9:39-10:16]**

Job thought in terms of the retribution principle. He thought that God's actions could be reduced to a simple equation. Many people today think the same thing. It's always a mistake. So, the scene in heaven, this first scene, has opened up the scenario, but it's not done yet. There's a second scene in heaven, and we'll be talking about that in the next segment.

This is Dr. John Walton and his teaching on the Book of Job. This is session 10, Sons of God and Satan [10:16]

**The Book of Job**  
**Session 11: Scene in Heaven, Part 2**  
**By John Walton**

This is Dr. John Walton and his teaching on the Book of Job. This is session 11, Scene in Heaven, Part 2.

**Introduction to Second Scene in Heaven [00:23-1:21]**

So now we move to the second scene in heaven. Job has lost all of his possessions, his sheep and cattle, his camels, his oxen, his sons and daughters. Everything that he has is lost. And so again, we have a conversation between Yahweh and the Challenger. There in chapter 2, verse five. No, I'm sorry, verse three. "Then the Lord said to the Challenger, 'Have you considered my servant Job? There's no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright,'" the same kinds of things he said the first time. "And he still maintains his integrity though you have incited me against him to ruin him without any reason." Okay.

**Incite [1:21-4:31]**

Now I want to look at that phrase a little bit. We want to look at the use of this verb "to incite" in Hebrew. It's the root "*sut*." And for those of you who have a little Hebrew, it's the Hiphil form, which is sometimes causative. But here, sometimes, it occurs with an indirect object and sometimes without. Here the subject is the Challenger. The verb, of course, is "incites." The direct object is Yahweh "you have incited me," and the indirect object is Job "against him to ruin him." So, we have three parties involved in the sentence, the Challenger and Yahweh, and Job

There are three other places in the Old Testament that use the verb in that kind of context. One of them is in 1 Samuel 26:19. There the subject is Yahweh; the object is Saul; that is, David is talking to Saul and says, "if Yahweh has incited you against me." So, David is the indirect object.

In 2 Samuel 24:1, it's Yahweh or his anger that incites David to take a census. Okay. He's inciting David against Israel. So there, Yahweh is the subject; David is a

direct object, and Israel is the indirect object. In Jeremiah 43:3, Baruch is the subject who incites Jeremiah, the direct object against Israel. I'm sorry, Jeremiah is a direct object; Israel's the indirect object. So, we have three other places besides Job 2:3, that use this verb and that have this setup that has a subject and a direct object, and an indirect object.

Now, if we examine those, we can learn something about usage and how it works. The incited action is always negative for the indirect object. Okay? The incited action is always negative for the indirect object though it's not intrinsically a sinful or evil action. After all, sometimes Yahweh is the one who's inciting. So, it's not intrinsically sinful or evil. In Job, as a direct object, Yahweh is accountable for the action against Job though the Challenger, as the subject, has influenced his decision. Job, as an indirect object, has no knowledge of the Challenger's role as the subject. He only understands Yahweh's role. He's the direct object. The Challenger incited Yahweh against David; I'm sorry, Job.

#### **Without a cause [Hinnam] [4:31-6:24]**

So, it is used in 1:9, when the Challenger raised the question about whether Job served God for no reason, that's this word *hinnam* "for no reason." So, he's incited him for no reason. So that's used in 2:3. It was also used in 1:9 about whether Job served God for no reason. So, does Job serve God for no reason; now, the Challenger has incited Yahweh against Job for no reason. It's the same Hebrew word *hinnam*.

This can refer to something done in vain. For instance, in Ezekiel 6:10, or something done unnecessarily as in 1 Samuel 25:31, or even something done without compensation, Jeremiah 29:15. And of course, that's the meaning in Job 1:9 that it's done without compensation. In most cases, it refers to something done without a cause, that is, undeserved treatment. And here would be passages like 1 Samuel 19:5 or 1 Kings 2:31.

So, we've got the scene set for us where this statement has been made by Yahweh. "You have incited me against him for no reason." Now, there we find out that God is not pushing responsibility or blame off on the Challenger. The Challenger has

incited, but that's not an intrinsically evil thing to do. But that's what's happened. And again, Job will know nothing of the Challenger's role, nothing whatsoever. It's never told to him.

### **Difference between the First and Second Heavenly Scenes [6:24-7:18]**

So, what's the result of this second round? In this second round, we have a little bit of a difference. The first round took away all the positive things, prosperity. The second round adds a negative. Here we get the physical suffering. So, the idea, and this is presented by the Challenger, the idea is, well, anybody can stand when they lose all their stuff, but when you start putting them in pain, now it's going to show. And so, God gives permission for that as well. So, this second round is different because it adds physical suffering. The first round brought mental anguish associated with loss and grief and the second brought physical problems associated with pain.

### **City Dump: Expelled and Ostracized [7:18-8:18]**

The skin disease that Job exhibits would have led to him being expelled from the city and ostracized. We really can't give a medical diagnosis of it, but skin disease was treated that way in the ancient world; that's cause for being ostracized. And so, he's expelled from the city, and he ends up at what the text refers to as the ash heap. This is like the city dump. It's not only garbage that was dumped there; it's dung that is dumped there. Job ends up sitting out at the city dump. It shows how low he's gone. He's been reduced this far. So, it's not just mere ashes that make it bad; that's not near bad enough to describe the situation he's in.

### **Rhetorical Strategy [8:18-9:19]**

So, what's the rhetorical strategy of this second scene in heaven? It assures that Job has every opportunity to abandon God if his only motive for faithfulness is to gain benefits. Again, now he is not only suffered loss. He is suffering pain. It makes sure he has every chance to abandon God, to find out what his motives really are. Tolerating pain



is different from tolerating loss. So, this scene escalated, and Job's situation became worse yet.

So, it's in that context that he encounters his wife and his three friends. And we're going to deal with the role that they each have and his responses to them in the next segment.

This is Dr. John Walton and his teaching on the Book of Job. This is session 11, Scene in Heaven, Part 2. [9:19]

## **The Book of Job**

### **Session 12: Role of the Wife and Friends**

**By John Walton**

This is Dr. John Walton and his teaching on the Book of Job. This is session 12, Role of the Wife and Friends.

#### **Introduction [00:23-00:42]**

Let's take a few minutes and look at the friends of Job and his wife, and let's talk about the roles they play. Of course, they show up at the end of chapter two here. And so, we're introduced to them in the plot. Let's take a look at how that's all working out.

#### **Friends as Having Individual Roles [00:42-2:55]**

Let's start with the friends. First of all, we can think of the friends as individuals. The book really wouldn't use three friends if each one didn't have a role. We have to think of them, then, as having individual profiles. Again, as you might recall, I'm treating this as a literary construct. So, the three friends, very intentionally, fill three roles. That's what the author wants to do with them. That's how their characters are used. And so as readers, we shouldn't just lump them all together and think of them as a corporate group. But rather try to see the role that each one plays.

Eliphaz, as he makes his explanations, his comments to Job is focused on the weight of personal experiences. We know people like this. They'll talk to us about their lives and their stories and what they've seen or experienced or concluded. Their conversation is based on those personal experiences that they've had.

Bildad is more inclined to talk about the wisdom of the ages. He's the philosopher among the group. Let's think about how people have always thought about these things. So, let me deliver it to you from an educated person. Here's the wisdom of the ages.

Zophar is most inclined to find understanding in a system of thinking. Let's systematize things. Everything's black and white if we just organize it correctly. And so,

we've got these three personalities, these three characters: experience, wisdom of the ages, and systemization. And so, they each have their own role to play.

### **The Friend's Role as a Group [2:55-4:30]**

At the same time, of course, they are acting as a group, as well, there are certain things that they all have in common. So, the friends corporately represent the sages of the ancient world. These are supposed to be the wisest people around. If anybody's got an answer, if any explanation exists, these are the people; these are the specialists. You've got the world's best right here, ranked one, two, and three. I don't know which is which, but here they are. So, they are there to present the height of wisdom in the ancient world.

But in the book, as we've mentioned already, they are foils. The book's playing them. Because even though they have this reputation of being the wisest of the wise, in the end, they are fools. The book rejects the wisdom that they have to offer as being shallow, inadequate, and flawed reasoning built on flimsy assumptions. Here they come as representatives of wisdom, and instead, they're dismissed as misguided fools. It's an interesting strategy for the book to take the best the world has to offer and to turn it on its ear and reject it summarily.

### **Friends as the Challenger's Representatives [4:30-7:28]**

The friends collectively play the role of the Challenger's philosophical representatives. Let me explain that. Remember, the Challenger has said, "Does Job serve God for nothing?" The friends represent retribution principle thinking; remember, that's where they build their fort. That means they're working on the principle of retribution and therefore working on the assumption that people get what they deserve.

Therefore, when Job suffers, they easily conclude that he must be suffering because he has done some great evil. They don't know what evil he has done. They make their random wild guesses throughout their speeches, but they don't know. They have no evidence. They have not seen any of it with their own eyes, but they assume it must be true. And so they draw the conclusion that Job has some serious issues to deal with and

that he needs to do so. Confess those sins, whatever they might be. Do whatever it takes to get your stuff back. The friends are all about stuff. Since the Challenger had said that if Job loses his stuff, he's going to give up his righteousness, we can see that the friends are working in that same line of argumentation. They are working hard to persuade him. It really is all about stuff. Your response should be to get your stuff back. If Job believes them, if Job responds along that line, that it really is about stuff, and I just need to get my stuff back. That would show that the Challenger was right, that Job's righteousness is really, in the end, all about the stuff. And so, we can conclude that the friends, unbeknownst to them, are inadvertently pressing the agenda for the very point the Challenger brought up. Is it about stuff, or is it about righteousness? The Challenger suspected it was about stuff. He seems to know human beings pretty well. The friends tried to help Job think of it in terms of stuff, but he wasn't so easy to persuade.

### **Misconceptions about the Friends [7:28-9:03]**

Now, when we understand this role of the friends, we can hopefully discard a couple of other misconceptions about the role of the friends. The role of the friends is not so that readers can be instructed on how not to give counsel and comfort. Lots of times, people respond to the friends in the book of Job by saying what little comfort they offer and how unsatisfying they are in trying to commiserate with Job and bring comfort to him. They're pretty rough on him. But the reader is not supposed to therefore say, "Well, now I know how I shouldn't try to comfort somebody who's suffering." That's not what the friends are there for. By the way, don't do that, but the friends are not there for that. They're not role models, in that case, negative role models, but they're not role models of any sort. They're role players. They play a role in the book, an important literary, theological, philosophical, and rhetorical role. When we're trying to understand the book, we should be trying to understand the role they play because that's how they're being used in the book. And that's how the teaching will emerge from the book with them in their proper place.

### **The Role of Job's Wife [9:03-9:56]**

So much for the friends; we'll detail their specific speeches later on. Let's turn our attention to the wife. Now, when she speaks up, Job has already suffered considerably. He's lost both stages. He's lost his prosperity. He's lost his health. It's interesting that the wife is not brought in as a conversation partner sitting next to him, weeping over their lost children. She's not really given a personality like that. Again, she's a role player. As with the friends, she also is standing on the side of the Challenger to try to push Job in a particular direction.

### **Wife as Quick Solution for the Challenger [9:56-10:26]**

In one sense, we could say that with the wife's words, "curse God and die," she represents the quick and easy solution from the Challenger's point of view. I mean, if Job has already been pushed over the brink already, you know, has lost all sense of righteousness or faithfulness to God, she'll push him over the edge. "Curse God and die." And he'll say, "Yeah, forget it all, chuck it." So, that's the quick and easy.

### **Friends and Wife Pushing in Tandem [10:26-13:37]**

The friends represent the same kind of thing for the wife. It's all about the stuff you lost. For the friends, try to get that stuff back. So, she's really working in tandem with the friends and in tandem with the Challenger, pushing that agenda. It's not going to just be left to Job's own mental workings to figure out whether his righteousness is more important than his stuff. He's being pushed, pushed by his wife, pushed by his friends. He's being given the suggestion, "Curse God and die." Make it about stuff, do what it takes to get your stuff back. So, that's the role she plays again, not that life partner who mourns alongside you. This is not supposed to be a critical shot at women by the author of the book. It has nothing to do with that. It's just the strategy of the moment of how he is going to respond. Job, of course, responds to her as a foolish woman. He states that "Shall we accept good from God and not trouble?" Again, a very positive response about God and about how we respond to God about not holding him accountable. And so, his wife serves as an instrument of the Challenger's expectations just as the friends do. Once

again, the Challenger would be proven correct if Job followed his wife's advice, just as the Challenger would be proven correct if Job followed his friend's advice.

The rhetorical role then of the wife, after all, is a one-off. She makes one statement. Then she's out of the picture. First of all, it avoids the quick win for the Challenger. It is not going to be easy. Second, it provides an opportunity for Job to again express his faithfulness. Not only can God take away what he has given. He can strike with pain and disease. Job remains faithful. Third, it serves as a prelude and transition to the friends because, of course, she comes on the scene before the friends do. Fourthly, it proposes a solution opposite the direction the friends will go. The friends want to tell Job how to live with renewed benefits. She tells him life is not worth living and tells him how to die. Fifth, both wife, and friends assume benefits are essential to the equation, pulling Job in the direction the Challenger has suggested that he will go.

#### **Friends and Wife Unwitting Agents of the Challenger [13:37-14:37]**

Therefore, all of them, the friends and Job's wife alike, serve as unwitting agents for the Challenger's expectations. So, the scene is set. The scenes in heaven have ended. The dialogues are about to begin. We are now back in the earthly realm where we will stay because even Yahweh when he speaks, comes to the earthly realm to speak. The Challenger will have no further role. It's only his surrogates the friends that stand in and make a case. So, he will have no further role. Now, we let the dialogue unfold as we move into Job's lament in chapter three and the first series of dialogues in the dialogue section.

This is Dr. John Walton and his teaching on the Book of Job. This is session 12, Role of the Wife and Friends. [14:37]

## **The Book of Job**

### **Session 13: Dialogue Series 1, Job 3-14**

**By John Walton**

This is Dr. John Walton and his teaching on the Book of Job. This is session 13, Dialogue Series 1, Job 3-14.

#### **Job's Lament (Job 3) [00:27-6:10]**

The dialogues begin in earnest in chapter four. Chapter three has Job's lament, which launches this whole section. In the structure of the book, Job's lament can be paralleled in part by his two responses to God's speeches toward the end of the book. Again, those are separated, and they're not near as long, but they sort of play a similar balancing role in the book. But here, Job's lament is opening up the dialogues.

Job begins the first part of the lament by cursing the day of his birth. Now, again, we get the word "curse" here, but this is a different word. This is not the word "*barak*," bless that's working euphemistically. The Hebrew word used is *qalal*, which involves incantation with a word of power. So, he's using an incantation against the day of his birth. He in 3.8 says to curse the day; that's a different word. So, three different words for "curse." *Barak* in euphemism, *qalal* an incantation with words of power, but then curse the day is *'arar*, and that refers to removing something from God's protection, the disruption of order. That's *'arar*. So, these three words, even though they're all translated "curse," have different nuances, and they work differently.

He also talks about rousing Leviathan. That would be something done by divinatory experts who would dabble in such things. Leviathan, again, represents the world of non-order, the world of chaos. Since Job is experiencing chaos, he invokes this idea of rousing Leviathan against the day of his birth.

In the second part of his lament, he expresses his wish that he had never been born. He wishes that he had gone straight from the womb to the nether world, or like a stillborn would have been, or a miscarriage would have been. So, he wishes that for himself rather than to have experienced what he has in the unfolding of the text. And

finally, in the last part of this lament, he turns to the misery of his present life, what he's now experiencing, and how difficult it is for him.

The lament is, of course, soul rending both for Job as he gives it and for us as we hear it. Readers can sometimes find a real connection to how Job feels about how horrible his life has become. From a rhetorical standpoint, it builds the transition between the prologue and the speeches through a shift in the genre, from narrative and the prologue to direct discourse in the speeches. It also gives turns to a theological emphasis as it considers what God's doing and what the world is like. In the lament, we see the development from a confident Job in his replies in the prologue section, now to a distraught, questioning Job.

So, Job is moving into his grief and expressing things differently. He's confident. Trust is eroding. He has no hope that death will lead to an eternity where all can be rectified. In Israel, in the biblical period, they had developed no hope for eternity, no reward and punishment. And Job being a non-Israelite, is even less inclined. So, he has no hope that somehow there'll be a solution to all of this after death. Death is what he wishes for, not for a solution but for an escape. Neither life nor death, at this point, offer him any hope, though, for him, death would be preferable to life.

We see that he has begun what is the natural inclination of all of us to ask why. Verses 11, 12, 16, 20, 23, why? why? why? It's the word that's on the lips of every suffering person. Why? And that's why the Book of Job offers us something of value. Not because it answers the question, but because it helps us to realize it's the wrong question.

At the same time, Job's lament betrays no hint that he actually believes he deserves what he has gotten. He's not come to that. He's not willing to say he did something to deserve all of this. And likewise, despite the fact that he's begun asking the why questions and that his trust is deteriorating, he's still maintaining his integrity.



### **Job's Integrity [6:10-8:00]**

Now, this integrity that Job maintains needs to be understood. The integrity is not the same thing as all of those positive descriptors of him in chapters one and two. His integrity is defined specifically as his insistence that his righteousness stands on its own. That is that he is not simply pursuing benefits. His righteousness is for righteousness' sake, not for what he gets out of it. That's integrity. That's the only thing that he has to maintain. We're going to find that Job goes to some very dark places in how he thinks about God. His accusations against God are clear and wrong. So, it's not like Job's response is somehow blameless itself. God's going to accuse him of wrongdoing in how he has responded to God. It doesn't matter. What matters is the question on the table: is Job's righteousness, a disinterested righteousness, and Job's integrity is to maintain that position. That's all he has to do for the book to proceed along. For God's policies, that's the important point.

### **Introduction to the First Dialogue Cycle [8:00-8:20]**

Now what are some of the issues that we face in cycle one of the dialogue? This carries us from chapters 4 to 14. It's the first cycle. So, Eliphaz speaks. Job responds. Bildad speaks. Job responds. Zophar speaks. Job responds in the first cycle, chapters 4 to 14.

### **Important Statements in the First Dialogue: 4:6 [8:20-10:15]**

There are a couple of important statements in this cycle. They are important for the book, important for the message that's being given, and well-known, but ones that we have to look at carefully to make sure that we understand them.

The first one is in 4:6 in chapter four, verse six, Eliphaz is speaking, and he says, "Should not your piety, be your confidence and your blameless ways your hope?" He's raising a question about how it is that Job should respond. "Should your piety be your confidence and your blameless ways your hope?" I would render that just to get the understanding a little paraphrase expanded: "Is not your self-proclaimed piety the basis for this irrational confidence?" Eliphaz believes Job's piety is only self-proclaimed, and

that his confidence is irrational and not substantiated. He's asking the question: is your only hope really in the presumed blamelessness of your ways? You've got to give me more Job; that's not enough. So, it's not undermining; the book is not undermining Job's piety or his blamelessness. Eliphaz is undermining whether the way Job thinks about them will suffice. It's just an example of some of the complexities of trying to translate very difficult Hebrew in the Book of Job.

**Important Statements in the First Dialogue: 4:17 [10:15-14:21]**

Also, in Eliphaz's speech, we have this account of his mystical experience. It's in verses 12 through 21, and I won't read it, but you can take a look at it.

Now it occurs in a vision that he reports in this vision; he's claiming revelation. He sets up the whole scenario of this spiritual experience to highlight what he considers a great insight, revelation into deep truth. And he expresses that in verse 17 of chapter four. This is how it's translated in the NIV; just as a base, take a look at it. It says, "Can a mortal be more righteous than God? Can even a strong man be more pure in his Maker? Now think about that for a moment. "Can a mortal be more righteous than God?" What kind of great insight is that? Doesn't everybody know that? I mean, why the long setup of this mystical experience just to say something that everybody in the world knows? That a mortal can't be more righteous than God. It sounds like a silly thing to say. Now, maybe he is trying to convey the idea that Job seems to think that he's more righteous than God. It may be a possibility, but we ought to look at it just a little bit, make sure we're on the right track.

The first problem we face is to ask, "Can someone be more pure than his Maker," in the second part of the verse. It's not really possible to compare a human's purity to God's because this term translated as "purity," *tahar* in Hebrew, is never used to describe God. God cannot be described as pure or impure. It's a category that's not applicable to God. And so, it really can't be saying whether you can be more pure than God if God can't be characterized as pure. It refers to a clean condition achieved from an unclean state. Since God can never be in an unclean state, God can, therefore, not be

*tahar*, a condition achieved from an unclean state. God cannot be unclean. So, he cannot be designated as clean.

Rhetorically. If we follow the traditional rendering of the verse, Eliphaz appears to have overplayed his case. There'd be no need for a mystical revelation to make the point that no one is more righteous than God. And you can't say that someone is pure or less pure than God.

Here's my alternate reading. "Can a mortal be righteous in God's perspective?" Can you achieve righteousness in God's perspective? "Can a man be clean in the perspective of his Maker?" Eliphaz here is questioning the absolutes. Can any of us really get to the point where we are clean or righteous in God's perspective?

Now in pursuing that, Eliphaz is echoing something we know well from the ancient Near East -- everyone's prone to sin. And really, we can even find that, of course, in Christian teaching. But here, it's not the idea that you can't be more righteous than God.

Now, for me to demonstrate that reading that I offer takes detailed Hebrew work, and I've got it in my commentary that I've published if people can get ahold of that, they can see the full detail of the treatment.

### **Important Statements in the First Dialogue: 7:17 [14:21-18:44]**

Another statement that we find that brings some question let's think a minute about chapter seven. We're into Job's speech. Now, Job's response to Eliphaz. And in chapter seven, verses 7 to 21 are among the most poignant that Job has to offer. He reminds us of some of Ecclesiastes as he talks about the transience of life.

So, we read, "Remember, O God, that my life is but a breath. My eyes will never see happiness again." He goes on to talk about that. And he says, "I won't remain silent." Therefore, in verse 11, "I'll speak out in the anguish of my spirit. I will complain in the bitterness of my soul. Am I the sea monster?" Am I the enemy? That's what he's asking. "That you have to put me under guard. When I think my bed will comfort me and

my couch will ease my complaint, even then, you frightened me with dreams so that I prefer strangling and death. I despise my life. Let me alone. My days have no meaning."

Then readers familiar with the Bible will get to verse 17 and see a very interesting, familiar line. "What is mankind that you make so much of them?" The attentive reader of Scripture will immediately recognize the line of Psalm 8, where it's such a positive thing. Look at what you've done. You've made us just a little lower than the angels. What are we that you've made so much of us? But Job turns that on its head. And he says, "Why do you pay so much attention to us? With all due respect, bug off; leave me alone, please."

So, he says, what is mankind that you make so much of them and give so much attention to? And he goes on to elaborate. "You examine them every morning, test them every moment. Will you please look away from me?" Again, very different from the Psalmist, who invites God's gaze, who invites God to see and examine. For Job, it's, "Please look away. I need a break. If I've sinned," and of course, Job doesn't suggest that he has, but even if that were the case, "what's it to you? Why have you made me your target? Why have I become a burden? Get over it."

So, we can see that this is true in Job's speeches. He increasingly turns his attention to God rather than really addressing the friends. Here he has accused God of being overly attentive and unrealistic in his expectations. Does that ring a bell? Remember chapter one, verses four and five. What are God's expectations? Is God overly attentive? That's why Job does all of this ritual for his sons and daughters. And so here, it's coming out.

Unlike a chaos creature, Job claims he's no threat to order. He doesn't warrant constant attention. He calls God, "a watcher of men." He uses a term that often bears a positive connotation indicating care and protection. But again, he turns it upside down. Job views himself as already on trial, already undergoing punishment. He requests a cease and desist order that God leaves him alone. He presumes that, somehow a trial has already happened and a guilty verdict has already been passed.

### **Important Statements in the First Dialogue: 7:20 [18:44-19:31]**

In verse 20. Instead of saying, "If I have sinned," I don't think that's how we should read it. Job is not even letting that possibility stand. I would read it, "I have sinned." But he only means that in terms of I have somehow fallen out of favor, so that you have acted against me. Whatever I might have done to you, why won't you pardon whatever I have done that you have judged as indictable? Forgive me, whatever sin you have imputed to me, for which you are punishing me. Job's talking in that hypothetical realm turn concerns how God is treating him.

### **Important Statements in the First Dialogue: 13:15 [19:31-22:31]**

One more verse. I want to look at; it in some detail; it's in chapter 13. It's a well-known verse from the Book of Job. And again, it's Job speaking. And the traditional translation is "Though he slays me, I will hope in him." When we look over how the translations and the commentaries have treated it, we see a wide array of diversity in translation. One of them reads, "Behold. He will slay me. I have no hope." Wow. That's a lot different from "Though He slays me, I will hope in him." This represents an alternate Hebrew reading. The Ketiv in which instead of the "in him," it's the negation. They both sound the same *lo* (to him) and *l'o* (no). And so, I will hope "in him" or "I have no hope." Again, it turns the whole thing around.

Another commentary reads. "If he were to slay me, I would have no hope." "If you were to slay me," remember the other two, "behold, he will slay me" or "though he slay me." So, you can see we're working with that Hebrew particle and exactly what it means. "If he were to slay me, I would have no hope," suggesting that he hasn't done that yet. So, there's still reason for hope.

Here we have we can see the whole question. Does he have hope, or doesn't he? There are three other commentators who agree on the reading. "Yes," not "if," "behold," or "though." "Yes, though he slays me. I will not wait in silence." Ah, this is a different understanding of the word that's translated as "hope." They sound very close, "hope" and

"wait" in Hebrew. And so, they're reading it differently. "I will not wait," meaning, "I will not wait in silence."

Okay. I would take a slightly different tact. I would agree with the back part of that one, but I would translate it, "Even though he may slay me. I will not wait in silence." I see it as Job expressing his intention to argue against God. Eliphaz had told him, you know, you don't want to go there. You go in and start arguing with God. Nothing good can come of it. You don't want to do that. Job is kind of arming himself with courage and saying, "even though he might slay me for it, I'm going to do it. I will not wait in silence. I'm going to make my claim." So that's how I would read it. Again, a very difficult verse, and various commentators and translators have had different ideas about what it says.

### **Summarizing the First Dialogue Cycle [22:31-23:00]**

Let's summarize the arguments in cycle one. When we get to the rhetorical strategy of the book, what we want to ask is: what does each speech contribute to the conversation? Again, we're assuming that these aren't here just for kind of flowery, poetic expressions. They are trying to accomplish something as the book's case moves forward. So, let's summarize each one, and you'll be able to see how they work.

### **Eliphaz's Speech and Job's Response [23:00-24:40]**

So, Eliphaz's speech in cycle one: I would summarize it this way. You have counseled many who are in similar circumstances as you are now. You should take your own advice. Trust in your piety. The retribution principle will hold. It's the wicked who perish yet from God's perspective, no mortal is righteous. Appeal to God, except his discipline. That's Eliphaz's first speech.

Job's response is summarized like this. The extent of my misery justifies my outcry. I wish he would put me to death. Then I would die with the consolation that at least I had assessed the situation realistically. I feel so helpless. I'm not sure I can continue, and my friends are of no help. I would be delighted if God would show me something that I had done wrong. My miserable days will soon come to an end. So, I may

as well speak my mind. Why, O God, have you targeted me for such attention? No one can bear such scrutiny. Can't you show some tolerance before it's too late? That's Job's first speech summed up in general.

Then Eliphaz's advice was to appeal to God and admit your offense. Job's reply: stop treating me as guilty rather than appeal to God with false humility and trumped-up offenses; I will confront him with demands for vindication. And thus, Job sets off on his path.

### **Bildad's Speech and Job's Response [24:40-26:23]**

In cycle one, the second speech by Bildad can be summarized this way. How dare you suggest that God perverts justice. Remember, Bildad is the wisdom of the ages spokesperson. How dare you suggest that God perverts justice? Your children undoubtedly sinned. I mean, that's a given. If they all died that way, undoubtedly, they sinned. Face the facts, come clean, then it will go smoothly for you. Traditional wisdom gives you all the information you need—the retribution principle: the wicked perish, but God does not reject a righteous man. Come back, Job, get your stuff back.

Job's response to Bildad can be summarized as this. How could anyone ever establish his righteousness before God? You can't argue with him and expect to win. Challenging him would indeed be disastrous. He's too strong to overpower. And he's beyond calling to account. I have nothing left to live for. So, I may as well say it outright. He is not just. Both the blameless and the wicked are destroyed. I wish I had an advocate to speak on my behalf. Suppose someone could only speak on my behalf. Nothing makes sense. I can't win. I wish God would just let me die. That's a summary of Job's response.

So Bildad's advice was to take the traditional approach. The retribution principle seriously recognizes the inevitable conclusion. Job's reply: I know the traditions are true, but I'm not ready to admit the conclusions are inevitable. Yet I'm without recourse.

### **Zophar's Speech and Job's Response [26:23-28:00]**

We get to Zophar. Zophar, remember he's black and white. What arrogance? Do you think you are so pure? Well, you haven't even begun to get what you really deserve.

Your understanding is minuscule compared to God. Give it up. Repent of your sin so that all may go well for you. Zophar sees things in very black-and-white terms.

Job's response to Zophar. "You, my friends, mock me. If only you would show your wisdom by being silent. You offer no comforting counsel and speak presumptuously and ignorantly on God's behalf. I suffer while the wicked escape scot-free. God is the fount of all wisdom and power. If only I could bring my case before him, I think I would have an airtight defense. I would request, however, that he cease and desist with the torment and the terrors until the matter is settled. Given such a moratorium, I could concentrate on my case. Show me the evidence of my wrongdoing. This life is all I have. So, I want to get this settled before it's too late.

So, Zophar's advice, in a nutshell, devote your heart to God, put away sin. Job's reply. You're badly misrepresenting both God and me. I hope I can get my hearing and restore my relationship with God before I die.

#### **Conclusion of the First Dialogue Cycle [28:00-28:50]**

So, in conclusion, this is our summary of cycle one. In this first series, each friend's speech ends with painting a rosy picture of the benefits of righteousness. The main focus of this series is that the friends appeal to Job to think about getting his benefits back and doing whatever is necessary to accomplish that. It's all about the stuff. The series comes to a conclusion when Job makes it clear that he has no hope for restoration and is not motivated by the desire that his friends have placed as the highest value. And that launches us into cycle two.

This is Dr. John Walton and his teaching on the Book of Job. This is session 13, Dialogue Series 1, Job 3-14. [28:50]



## **The Book of Job**

### **Session 14: Dialogue Series 2, Job 15-21**

**By John Walton**

This is Dr. John Walton and his teaching on the Book of Job. This is session 14, Dialogue Series 2, Job 15 – 21.

#### **Introduction [00:26-00:58]**

As we come into cycle two in the dialogue section, again, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar will each speak, and Job will respond to each of them. We're not going to target any of the specific verses in this section. And so, I'll spend some time opening up their rhetorical strategy as I did with cycle one. So, we'll summarize each speech and then give a nutshell for each of the exchanges, and that'll cover us here.

#### **Cycle 2: Eliphaz and Job's Response [00:59-2:35]**

So, we begin again with Eliphaz, his second speech now. This is about how it goes. Job, your bluster is a disgrace. You're merely digging a deeper hole for yourself. What makes you think that you are so much better than everyone else? Stop railing against your circumstances except that which has come upon you. It's the result of the corruption shared by all humanity. Since wicked people are ferreted out, you ought to consider how much you have in common with them.

Job's response: talk is easy, Eliphaz, but I would be more encouraging if I were you. Meanwhile, God, why are you attacking me? You've abandoned me to be tormented by enemies, and then you piteously join in yourself. If you can't respond to my misery, I need someone to stand up for me. As for me, I'm determined to stay the course of righteousness though death is all I have to look forward to.

So, we would synthesize this response, and put it in a nutshell, Eliphaz's advice, recognize your guilt by comparing how God treats the wicked and how he's treating you match up. You've nullified piety. Job's reply: I need protection from God's attacks and call for an advocate to take up my case. I need some help.

### **Cycle 2: Bildad and Job's Response [2:35-3:36]**

That moves us to Bildad's talk. Bildad is getting briefer for now. God's judgment of the wicked is severe, and those who are subject to it, including you, by the way, Job, can be classified as ones who really do not know God.

Job replies, despite your accusations, I've done nothing, yet God and his inexplicable anger have made a mess of my life. I'm an outcast despised by all. I'm confident that someone will come and help and that just when all seems finally lost, I will be vindicated. You, supposed friends, are in more jeopardy than I am.

So Bildad's general advice, give up the pretense; wicked people are doomed. You're among them. You don't know God. Job's reply, it's God that's messed up my life, not me. A defender will arise and vindicate me from your insinuations.

### **Cycle 2: Zophar and Job's Response [3:36-4:58]**

Then we move to Zophar. Of course, as always you offend me, says Zophar. You know how the rules work; your self-righteousness betrays you, for all know that such pride characterizes the wicked, Zophar.

Job's response: I realized that I'm risking a lot by pressing legal action against God. Notice that he's ignoring Zophar entirely by pressing legal action against God. You realize how many wicked people prosper despite their arrogance against God. That makes me think he does nothing about that. In such a world, it is a complex and terrifying thing to try to call God to account. If God does not consistently punish the wicked, couldn't we conclude that he does not consistently protect and prosper the righteous? I wonder. This is actually the closest that Job gets to denying the retribution principle. I wonder, couldn't it be that way?

So, in Zophar's assessment, your sin is your pride; God has judged who is wicked. Enough said, no more conversation. Job's reply, the system's broken.

### **Summary of Cycle 2 [4:58-5:54]**

So, our summary of cycle two: the second cycle as a whole, has focused on the premise of the retribution principle that God judges the wicked. The associated inferences

insinuate that those who are apparently under judgment must indeed be wicked. Job's last speech gets as close as ever to rejecting the retribution principle. His friends have lost their confidence in Job, and Job's view of God continues to deteriorate though he unwaveringly insists on his own righteousness. This is that part of Job building his fort in his corner and being willing to question God. He rejects the confession and appeasement resolutions that are proposed by the friends as his desire for legal resolution escalates.

### **Vindication (Job) Versus Restoration (Friends) [5:54-7:34]**

Job continues to insist on vindication rather than restoration. See, that's that difference between righteousness and stuff. Vindication is: you are righteous. Restoration means: give me my stuff back. The friends are pushing toward restoration. Job is pressing for vindication. This is a really important distinction in the book. Remember, it is this precisely which defines Job's integrity. So, Job insists on vindication rather than restoration.

His friends consider vindication an unrealistic and vain expectation. In their view, Job needs to identify with the wicked since his experiences indisputably place him in that category. Might as well admit it, Job; this is the group you're in.

So, we find that after this cycle, things are not getting any better. Job is being increasingly placed among the wicked by his friends. And yet he continues to push his case against God.

Now the next segment, we're going to pay close attention to one of the small segments of verses well-known that are in cycle two. And so, we'll deal with that particularly and try to understand it and its role in cycle two, which we've just summarized.

This is Dr. John Walton and his teaching on the Book of Job. This is session 14, Dialogue Series 2, Job 15 - 21. [7:34]

## **The Book of Job**

### **Session 15: Job 19:25--I know my Redeemer lives**

**By John Walton**

This is Dr. John Walton and his teaching on the Book of Job. This is session 15, Job 19.25

#### **Introduction: Job 19.25 [00:23-2:02]**

In the midst of chapter 19, in Job's speech, responding to Bildad comes one of the most familiar verses in the Book of Job. As translated in the NIV, it says, "I know that my Redeemer lives and that in the end, he will stand on the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh, I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes-- I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me." So, what's going on here? And, of course, these verses are very familiar because of Handel's Messiah and that wonderful song, "I Know My Redeemer Lives." So, how should we interpret this verse? Well, let's work through it.

First of all, it needs to be understood in relation to Job's many references that have already gone by where he refers to an advocate related to his legal case. He's looking for someone to represent him before God, someone who will take his case, take his part, and advocate for him. This is another word that suggests that. There are a number of words that Job uses to refer to this position. And, of course, this is just one of them. There are several others in the book. In fact, they all focus on the same kind of role of someone that'll take Job's part.

#### **Advocate = Personification of Job's cry View [2:02-2:44]**

Now, we have to ask the question, what sort of advocate does Job seek, and who does he expect to fill that role? Where does he expect this advocacy to come from? D. J. Cline's commentary, an excellent commentary, tries to understand the advocate impersonally as a personification of Job's cry of innocence. He thinks that that cry itself

will kind of stand, without the voice that gave it sound, and that will be his advocate when he's gone.

### **Advocate [*goel*] = God or Human Relative View [2:44-3:49]**

A second view, and a more traditional one, a very common one, is that God is the advocate, but that's, of course, quite problematic. A mediator can't be one of the parties, especially the one accused of injustice. It wouldn't make a lot of sense for him to be the advocate against himself when he's the one being accused.

Others have suggested that the advocate role would be played by a human relative. The Hebrew word translated as "Redeemer" is *goel*, and *goel* had a particular legal function within the clans of Hebrew society. They were the ones that stood up for the rights of the family. So, the idea that this would be a human relative would make some sense of the word that's being used, but we've got a problem. All his relatives have deserted him. So, it's very difficult to think that he will hope for an advocate from those ranks.

### **Advocate [*goel*] = Elihu View [3:49-4:14]**

When we later on, get to Elihu's speech, Elihu projects himself as the advocate. He is presented as one who has a high opinion of himself, as we'll learn, but he projects himself, but he's got a different sort of outcome in mind than Job has. Elihu does not see vindication as the end of that result. So, that's not the kind of *goel* that Job is looking for.

### **Advocate [*goel*] = Member of the Divine Council [4:14-6:49]**

In my view, the most likely option is that Job is looking for an advocate from the membership of the divine council. He's looking for someone to stand up and take his part in the heavenly realm where decisions are being made. It's an option referred to by Elihu in Job 33, verses 23 and 24. It's also an option that was discarded early on by Eliphaz in 5:1, and in 22:2 and 3, where Eliphaz basically said, "Don't count on that.

That's not going to work out for you." And that shows that that would be a theoretical possibility.

With 22:2 and 3, I do have a retranslation of that. Again, a very difficult couple of verses, and I would translate it; again I can't defend it here; you'll find it in my commentary. "Can a wise mediator do any good for a human being serving on behalf of God? Can such a mediator bring a human any benefit? Will God respond favorably? When you justify yourself, will there be a gain when you give a full account of your ways." That's Eliphaz's case "really that's not going to get you anywhere." It's really, and you know, he's got a point here. It's counterproductive to prove God wrong. You know, it's just something in the end that's going to be unsatisfying about that whole option.

We find then that Job very deeply desires some sort of advocate or mediator to come to his aid. It's rather ironic that he doesn't know about the scene of heaven when it was precisely a member of the heavenly court that came before God that started this whole process. An advocate has already been involved, the Challenger, but he was challenging God's policies, and it got Job into this fix. Job is unlikely to procure another. Even if he did, he could not win. If by some fluke he did win, the result would be devastating because if Job is right about God and with the help of a mediator, he forces God to admit to wrong, then God ends up being unworthy of worship. If Job uses this strategy and wins, God loses.

### **Redeemer [*goel*] is not Jesus [6:49-8:01]**

So, what do we have here in Job 19.25 to 27? Lots of people have heard the word "redeemer." And especially when they see it capitalized in some translations, they assume that the Redeemer is Jesus. Because, after all, we know Jesus as our Redeemer. Hebrew doesn't have capital letters. So, the capitalization is interpretation. And Handel's Messiah, as beautiful a musical work as it is, is not our guide to interpretation.

Does Job express the need for someone like Jesus? Is that the kind of advocate he wants? No New Testament author draws the connection between Jesus and Job in

chapter 19. So, we really need to work in the context of Job itself. No New Testament passage or author is going to give us an enlarged supplemented interpretation.

### **Role of a *Goel* is Vindication not Forgiveness [Advocate/Redeemer] [8:01-10:34]**

A *goel*, again, that's the word translated redeemer, a *goel* is one who enters a legal situation on behalf of another. That's what a *goel* does. If a wrong is involved, the *goel* rights the wrong done to a person rather than getting involved on their behalf to right the wrong the person has committed. A *goel* is trying to right a wrong done to a person. That's, of course, Job's situation. He feels like a wrong has been done to him.

A *goel* does not work on behalf to right a wrong the person has committed. That's what Jesus did, but that's really not the role that we find. Job wants an advocate here, a *goel* and redeemer, who will demonstrate that he is innocent. He's not looking for someone to save him from the offenses he has committed. He's persuaded he has not committed anything that deserves the treatment he has gotten. He's not looking for someone to save him from offenses. If he admits to offenses, the game is lost. He wants it on record that he did nothing to deserve his suffering; that's not the redeemer role that Jesus plays. In fact, it's the opposite. Job is convinced that his *goel* is alive. "I know that my *goel* lives."

That's not something about the resurrection of Jesus. He lives for Job right now. That's what Job's convinced of. And that *goel* will take a stand. The verb is used in a literary sense for giving one's testimony. He will testify on my behalf. He expects the *goel* to arrive at his dung heap. That's the dust that it refers to here. So, he expects the advocate to come here.

### **Yet in My Flesh [10:34-12:27]**

So, three interpretations of this idea of "after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God." Some think that Job expects resurrection. There's nothing anywhere in the Old Testament that leads to support that kind of expectation. Some think that Job expects post-humous vindication. That even after I'm gone, that somehow, I will

be vindicated. Others think that Job expects a last-minute reprieve. That's the direction that I tend to go in my interpretation. When he talks about that "after my skin has been destroyed," I think he's referring to the flaying off of his skin that he's doing as he scrapes himself with a potsherd scraping off his skin.

So, even after it's all gone, if I sit here, flaying myself, until it's all gone "in my flesh, I will see God." That means that I will be restored to God's favor. To see God means being restored to his favor. Though his skin is gone, that's hyperbole; he's been scraping away at it, he will see God's restoration in the flesh. Skin/flesh very nicely done-before he dies. Job has no hope of heaven. Seeing God refers to being restored to favor and that he'll no longer be a stranger, an outsider, out of favor.

### **Summary Paraphrase [12:27-13:08]**

So, I would paraphrase it in this way. I firmly believe that there is someone, perhaps from the divine council, but unspecified, someone somewhere who will come and testify on my behalf right here on my dung heap at the end of all this. Despite my peeling skin, I expect to have enough left to come before God in my own flesh. I will be restored to his favor and no longer be treated as a stranger. This is my deepest desire; by the way, prosperity has nothing to do with it.

### **Job's Affirmation: Vindication, not forgiveness [13:08-14:03]**

This is a significant affirmation on Job's part. We miss it entirely when we try to make the redeemer be Jesus. Jesus is our Redeemer, but he's not the kind of redeemer Job is looking for here. So, Job is not looking for someone who will take the punishment for his offenses and justify him. He's looking for vindication, not justification. He doesn't think he deserves any punishment that someone else would take on them. Vindication is emphatically not something that Jesus provides. Job is expecting someone to play a role that is the polar opposite of that which is played by Jesus.

### **Jesus is not Job's *Goel* [14:03-14:58]**



Viewing Jesus as the *goel* in Job is a distorting factor in the interpretation of the book and runs against the grain of Job's hope and desire. Jesus is not the answer to the problems posed in the book of Job, though he is the answer to the larger problem of sin and the brokenness of the world. The death and resurrection of Jesus mediate for our sin but do not provide the answer for why there is suffering in the world or how we should think about God when life goes wrong. That's what the Book of Job does, and we have to treat the book in such a way that we can understand the message that it has in its pages.

This is Dr. John Walton and his teaching on the Book of Job. This is session 15. Job 19.25.

[14:58]

## **The Book of Job**

### **Session 16: Dialogues Cycle 3, Job 22-27**

**By John Walton**

This is Dr. John Walton and his teaching on the Book of Job. This is session 16, Dialogues Cycle 3, Job 22-27.

#### **Introduction to Dialogue Cycle 3 [00:26-00:46]**

Now we're ready to get into Cycle 3 of the dialogues. Cycle 3 is much briefer as most of the arguments are sort of running out. In this cycle, Zophar does not speak at all, and Bildad has a very short speech. So, we have less content in the dialogue itself.

#### **Difficult Verses: Job 22:2-3 [00:46-6:32]**

We do, however, have a couple of very difficult verses to deal with and so we're going to work with the technical things first and try to sort those out before we move on to the summaries. The first one is in chapter 22, verses 2 and 3. Here we're at the very beginning of this last speech of Eliphaz. The NIV translates, "Can a man be of benefit to God? Can even a wise man benefit him? What pleasure would it give the Almighty if you were righteous? What would he gain if your ways were blameless?"

I'll look at the various translations and the commentators, which show a wide divergence of translation. So, a few examples, Norman Habel says, "Can a hero endanger El? Or a sage, endanger the Ancient One? Is it a favor to Shaddai if you are righteous, or is it his gain if you perfect your ways? Hartley translates, "Can a man benefit to God that a wise man should be in harmony with him? What asset is it to Shaddai that you are innocent or gain that you claim your ways are blameless? Cline's translates. "Can a human be profitable to God? Can even a sage benefit him? Is it an asset to the Almighty if you are righteous? Does he gain if your conduct is blameless?" You can see just between those that there's a wide variation.

Based on a couple of other examples of the same kind of syntax in the Book of Job. There's a very complex syntax in these verses. And based on the syntax from other verses that start exactly the same way and it's set up the structure the same way.

I have a different suggestion to make. The three verses where the same structure occurs: Job 13:7, Job 21:22, and this one Job 22:2, I would render it: "Can a wise mediator do any good for a human being serving on behalf of God?" That is a wise mediator serving on behalf of God. "Can such a mediator bring a human any benefit? Will God respond favorably when you justify yourself? Will there be gain when you give a full account of your ways?" Then you can see that it's a little bit different. Job 34:9 shows that the word "*gever*," which most of these are translated as "man" although Habel translated it as "hero," Job 34:9 shows that it must be the object rather than the subject, and that's really one of the main differences between my rendering and others. I put "wise mediator" as the subject of the first sentence, the translation of the Hebrew word, *maskil*, which both in the Hebrew text and in most translations occurs in the second line. But again, these other verses that I pointed to show reason to apply that even as the subject to the first line. I've rendered the verb *sakan* "do any good." "Can it do any good?" And I've not said God is a direct or indirect object, such as benefit to God. I've removed him grammatically one step further from the action that is "on behalf of God." And again, there's reason to do that based on the other verses that I mentioned. The decision based on the other two occurrences helps us to render this verse in line with how we find syntax set up in other places in the Book of Job.

Contrary to the other translations that rendered the verb in the first line in verse 3, simply as "be righteous" or "be innocent," I've rendered it "justify yourself" on the evidence of Job 40 verse 8, where Job was accused by God of justifying himself. The qal form of the verb *sadak* is furthermore used for vindication numerous times in the book of Job. For instance, 11.2 and 13.8. Finally, the last verb in 22.3, the Hiphil form of the roots to *tamam* is quite challenging. The translations above treat it variably as an adjective expressed as fact "to be blameless," or as "a claim of blamelessness," or even as

a verb "to perfect your ways." It's a verbal form in the Hiphil that occurs only eight times. My translation of "give a full account of your ways" is based on the observation that in many of the other contexts, it roughly concerns paying off or rendering an account of something. Note, especially 2 Kings 22:4. So again, based on all of those grammatical and syntactical situations, I've rendered it, "Can a wise mediator do any good." Let me do that again, "Can a wise mediator serving on behalf of God do any good for a human being? Can such a mediator bring any human benefit? Will God respond favorably when you justify yourself? Will there be a gain when you give a full account of your ways?" This makes a lot of sense in the context of the arguments that have been made in the book and again, with the kind of syntax and vocabulary use that we see in other places.

### **Difficult Verses: Job 26:7 [6:32-13:36]**

The verse that I want to give attention to is Job 26:7; the NIV translates it, "He spreads out the northern skies over empty space, he suspends the earth over nothing." It's worth paying attention to because some leaders have looked at that last phrase, "suspending the earth over nothing," and have drawn the conclusion that somehow in the Book of Job, they know about the earth, just kind of hanging in orbit, held by gravity and centripetal force and all of those things, which I think is a very unreasonable thought that the book assumes that or anticipates that. It really doesn't accord with the word. So, let's take a quick look at it.

In the first part of the line, "he spreads out the northern skies." The word for north is *zaphon*. It's a fairly normal Hebrew word for north. But it also refers to Mount Zaphon, the Canaanite mountain where the gods dwelt. Its significance, therefore, lies not in its orientation with the points of the compass but in its use as a reference to the sacred mountain that's known in the literature outside of Israel. Even in Israel, some of the Psalms do that as well. So, Zaphon is more than just a direction here. If we understand it as referring to the cosmic mountain, the cosmic mountain has its foundations in the netherworld and its heights in the heavens, and the divine council meets at its heights. It's

the meeting place of heaven and earth and the convening place for the assembly of the gods and thus their dwelling place--heaven. So, I'm taking Zaphon then as that sort of reference. The verb "he spreads out Zaphon. "Spreads out" is *noteh*, a Hebrew word that suggests that he's talking about the heavens since this verb usually takes heaven as its object in biblical cosmology texts.

Now, he's spreading out something heavenly, Zaphon, over empty space. The word "empty space" is *tohu*. It's known from Genesis 1:2 *tohu vabohu* "formless and void," and both in Genesis 2 and in the other 30-plus occurrences that we find of the word, it refers to that which is non-existent in the sense that it's non-ordered non-functional. And so, this is the non-ordered world. So, the idea that God spreads out the heavenly Zaphon over *tohu*, over that which is non-existent. What's usually referred to as non-existent is the cosmic waters. I know we think that existence has to do with material, but they didn't in the ancient world. They believed that existence had to do with function and order. So, something material that we judge material could also be non-existent. They considered the oceans non-existent; they considered the deserts non-existent because they were not ordered into the human realm and functioning for them. So here, the idea that Zaphon is spread out over a *tohu* is an indication of the cosmic waters above in non-existent, non-functional, non-ordered cosmic waters above over which the heavens were indeed stretched, cf. Psalm 104:2, 3.

*Tohu* in the first line parallels the unique phrase *velema* in the second line. That's the word that, again, the NIV translates as "nothing." This is the only place this word occurs, and of course, that makes it a very difficult situation for us. We usually determine the meaning of words by their usage. If we don't have other examples of usage, we are hampered in trying to understand the meaning of the word. The idea that its matterless space, which is where the earth is suspended would be anachronistic. Nobody in the ancient world or the Hebrew Bible knows anything about such things. Again, with the Egyptian sense of the non-existent, it refers to that which lacks function or order. The verb in this second clause is the verb *talah* which means "to suspend." It often refers to a

form of execution, to hang someone. It's better translated to suspended on, as they would hang someone on a picket or something of that sort or a tree. It is better translated "suspended on" not "over."

Even the word "earth" in this sentence is not straightforward. We would think that would be an easy one. But in a few instances, both in the Hebrew Bible and from the ancient Near East cognate languages, it also referred to the nether world. So here I think *eretz* should be a reference not to the earth itself but to the nether world. So we have both *tohu* in the first line and *belema* in the second that describe the non-existence, which is the cosmic waters, which we know we have cosmic waters above and cosmic waters below.

We have Zaphon, which talks about the realm above. And we have *eretz*, which talks about the realm below. Therefore, my rendering would be "heaven is stretched out over cosmic non-existence, the earth is suspended on the non-existent." So, you get the waters above and the waters below.

These two verses that we've talked about are just examples of the difficulties that we face in the Book of Job. When we open up an English translation, we often have this idea that somehow everything's been worked out and that the text is understood. But especially in Hebrew Bible, that's not necessarily the case. There are still lots of words that pose problems to us, or whose meanings are unknown, or maybe whose meanings are generally known, but the full nuances are difficult to capture in English words. We encounter syntax difficulties, especially in poetic texts. And so, we face a lot of problems; translators do the best they can, commentators try to shed light on it all. You know, everyone's working together to try to come to the best understanding of the text possible. The Book of Job, as I've mentioned, is particularly difficult. And so, we find these problems such as the two that we've just mentioned.

### **Rhetorical Strategy of Cycle 3 [13:36-13:53]**

So, fortunately, at another level of understanding, we can look at the rhetorical strategy and the general sense of the cycle, the cycle of the dialogue, and get a good idea of what's going on even though a couple of the verses are still giving us trouble.

### **Cycle 3: Eliphaz and Job's Response [13:53-16:33]**

So, let's summarize the arguments of cycle three. Eliphaz, of course, is the main speaker for the friends. He basically has the idea of all of your talk of a mediator; remember, Job has brought this up before, a mediator, advocate, *goel*, redeemer, all your talk of a mediator and a hearing is hollow. It's a smoke screen. God obviously knows your wicked deeds of injustice. You've got what you deserve. And I, for one, am glad of it. Your best course of action is to start listening, and stop arguing. When you do, just imagine all the benefits and favor you will again enjoy. Now notice Eliphaz's common focus on getting your stuff back. Here, it's hard to still consider him a friend. These are very harsh words. He's no longer being gentle; if he ever was, he's no longer being gentle with Job. So, Eliphaz is going deeper and deeper, in his accusations.

Job hardly even gives a thought to Eliphaz to summarize his statement: If only I could find God, I fantasize about what that would be like, but it's hopeless. I'm innocent, and he knows it. What a terrifying position to be in. Why doesn't God do something about this mess? Oppressive people do whatever they want without any accountability. Poor people trying to scrape out a living suffer under their unchecked tyranny. Criminals go about their business unrestrained, but I'm still convinced that there is no future for such people. Their wickedness will catch up with them eventually.

See that Job is still holding on to the retribution principle, and he's still trying to make the world make sense with the retribution principle, but he recognizes that his own circumstances, his own experiences, aren't really supporting that principle very well. So Eliphaz's advice, repent, be restored, and go on the lecture circuit. I say that a bit facetiously because he basically presents the idea: Then you can tell everybody else how God has worked in your life. So, go on the lecture circuit. Job's reply: Look around you.

Who can think about self when the world is so out of sync? So, that's how the Eliphaz and Job exchange goes.

### **Cycle 3: Bildad and Job's Response [16:33-18:04]**

Now, Bildad jumps in just for a few verses and basically remember wisdom of the ages; that's Bildad. God is unimaginably great. Humans are intrinsically flawed and don't ultimately matter anyway. Thanks, Bildad.

Job's response to Bildad: Your position is preposterous and totally unpersuasive. You've referred to God establishing order, but you haven't begun to grasp the immensity of God's work. Yet for all of the order that he has established in the cosmos, this is where verse 26 comes in; he's brought nothing but disorder into my life. Nevertheless, I will follow the advice that all of you have offered. I'm sorry; let me get that right. Nevertheless, I will never follow the advice that all of you have offered. My righteousness is all I have. I will cling to it until the end. You have become my enemies and, therefore, God's enemies. So, we all know what's in store for you.

So, synthesizing Bildad's advice: face the facts the tradition knows best. Job's reply: God's immense power has brought order to the cosmos but not to my life. I am God's victim, and you will be too. Here I stand with only my righteousness to cling to. The philosophical focus and the resolution of this series of speeches hinge on whether or not Job will admit to sin. That's what the entire dialogue cycle has been about. Eliphaz explicates his accusations, which Job resolutely denies.

### **Return to the Challenger's Accusation [18:04-19:24]**

Remember that from the beginning of the book, the challenge on the table was that Job would curse God to his face? It's the question of whether there is disinterested righteousness. We've talked about the idea that Job needs to maintain his integrity, no matter what else he gets right or wrong about God or about the world, or about his perception of his own situation or how he evaluates his experiences, no matter how any of that goes, as long as he maintains his integrity, that his righteousness is about righteousness, not about benefits then the Challenger's accusation will be turned away.



The friends and the wife remember representing that position, drawing Job to value his stuff rather than his righteousness. Job has resolutely denied that way of thinking.

### **Conclusion of the Dialogue Section [19:24-21:02]**

That means that we really come to a major conclusion in chapter 27:1 through 6. These are in Job's final words, and I just summarized it, but let's read it because it really is important for how the dialogue section ends. I'm actually going to start in 27:2 "As surely as God lives, who has denied me justice, the Almighty, who has made my life bitter, as long as I have life within me, the breath of God in my nostrils, my lips will not say anything wicked, and my tongue will not utter lies." Pause for a moment; what lies is he talking about? The lies he's talking about would be found if he were to agree that he had sinned, if he was to confess sin that he didn't believe he had committed.

So, I will not utter lies. "I will never admit you are in the right; till I die, I will not deny my integrity." Again, what's this integrity we're talking about? Next verse. "I will maintain my innocence and never let go of it; my conscience will not reproach me as long as I live." Job's holding on to his innocence, that is, that he has not done anything to deserve this, that he is righteous, and that's what it's all about, not the stuff. That's his integrity.

### **Challenger's Case is Done: Job Maintained his Innocence [21:02-21:43]**

This speech, then, this final peg in the dialogue section, brings the treatment of the Challenger's contention to a conclusion. At this point, the Challenger's case is done, and he's been proven wrong. Job has maintained his innocence under the fiercest of attack, and he has maintained his righteousness, even though he's exhibited a lot of wrong thinking along the way; remember, Job is not right. He's not giving the right perspectives on God, but he does maintain his integrity.

**Parts ways with Friends [21:43-22:17]**

He rejects his friend's advice. He refuses to seek the restoration of his prosperity by just accepting any suggestion that he has sinned. So, at this point, we've reached an important juncture in the book. The dialogue cycle is over the Challenger's contention is set aside. The friends are done. They really aren't involved in the second part of the book till the very end, where they're mentioned again.

**Transition to Discourse Section [22:17-22:49]**

This is where we move into a transition to the discourse section, where it's Job's accusation that's going to be taken up. Is it a good policy for righteous people to suffer? But before we get to that, we're going to have the transition found in the hymn to wisdom in chapter 28, and we'll pick up with that in the next segment.

This is Dr. John Walton and his teaching on the Book of Job. This is session 16, Dialogues Cycle 3, Job 22- 27. [22:49]

**The Book of Job**  
**Session 17: Conclusion of the Dialogues Series,**  
**Wisdom Interlude Chapter 28**

**By John Walton**

This is Dr. John Walton and his teaching on the Book of Job. This is session 17, Conclusion of the Dialogue Series, Wisdom Interlude Chapter 28.

**Review [00:25-1:54]**

Now we want to talk about this interlude chapter, the hymn to wisdom in chapter 28, but let's review a little bit where that has brought us here so that we can have our bearings going into it. The dialogue section is complete. Job has finished with his friends. That conversation is over. Job has not been seduced by the prospect of renewed benefits. Even though that's been the pressure, he basically has concluded that the system known as the retribution principle is broken. That was series two in the dialogues. He has refused to admit wrongdoing as the cause of his calamity. That was series three, cycle three, in the dialogues.

He has proven that his righteousness is not founded on the expectation of reward, and in so doing, he has served well as the star witness for the defense of God's policies. He has demonstrated that there is such a thing as disinterested righteousness. So, the Challenger's claim that God's policy of rewarding righteous people was counterproductive and even subversive has been cast aside. The friends who represented the Challenger's case had been silenced--case dismissed.

**Hymn to Wisdom (Job 28) – Narrator's Intermission [1:54-2:47]**

But now we make our transition through the wisdom interlude to the discourse section. Chapter 28, again, as we talked about, when we discussed the structure of the book, chapter 28 does not actually introduce a different speaker. Therefore, it's easy to conclude that somehow Job continues to speak. As I mentioned back in that segment, the problem is that the things being said in chapter 28 don't reflect very well at all on Job's actual viewpoints expressed either before or after. So, I look at this as the work of the

narrator who is giving us a kind of an intermission, so to speak, and transitioning us to a different way of thinking.

### **Structure of Job 28, Hymn to Wisdom [2:47-3:46]**

So, chapter 28 verses 1 through 11 use the illustration of mining. The basic thrust of that illustration is that mining brings hidden things to light. In verses 12 through 19, there are a number of rhetorical questions concerning wisdom. It's suggested that wisdom is inaccessible to humans yet beyond value and beyond human effort and ingenuity. There are numerous indicators of what this is. Now this is a cosmic discussion, and there are numerous indicators of that. Then the final segment of chapter 28, verses 20 to 28, God provides a path to wisdom, and the fear of God is the foundation for wisdom.

### **Job 28: Wisdom and Order Nexus [3:46-5:02]**

So, what are some of the points being made? First of all, wisdom cannot be found in 28:12, but it comes from God that's in 28:20. So, it contrasts the search, trying to find it, from the source. God is the one who gives it. Wisdom is found in the ordering of the components of the cosmos. Again, here we find an important connection between wisdom and order. This is true throughout the Bible. Wisdom is found when one goes about pursuing order and perceiving order, and practicing order. An ordered world, ordered life, and ordered society are all the pursuits of wisdom. So, wisdom is found in the ordering of the components of the cosmos. Order, it goes on to say, is not readily observable in daily operations, but it was instrumental in the foundation of creation, and it is inherent in the ongoing operations.

### **Friends justice focus, God wisdom focus [5:02-7:01]**

Job and his friends think that they know how the cosmos was ordered. The retribution principle is their operating theory. In that equation, the righteous will prosper; the wicked will suffer; to them this is how the world is ordered. But, of course, that's not the case. Job and his friends have not found true wisdom. When we look at verse 27, "Then he [God] looked at wisdom and appraised it. He confirmed it and tested it." Here

God approves creation by the criterion of wisdom, not by the criterion of justice. When Job and his friends tried to make the retribution principle the foundation of order, they were making justice the foundation of order in the cosmos. This phrase by God, turns that around and says, "No, the foundation is not justice." He looked at wisdom and appraised it confirmed it, tested it, and approved creation by the criterion of wisdom. So, this is a little bit different perspective. The equation that Job and his friends have used has been shown to be inadequate.

The protagonists we've met so far, Job's friends, all have reputations as being among the wisest that the world has to offer. But when we think back through the dialogues through their speeches, the fear of the Lord has not figured prominently in their comments. And here, that's what the book focuses on.

### **Job 28:18 Fear of the Lord is Wisdom [7:01-7:26]**

Verse 28 is interesting in the way it sets up. It's an instruction to humankind, *adam*. When we read it: "And he said to the human race," this is NIV. "He said to the human race, [that's *adam*] the fear of the Lord--that is wisdom, and to shun evil that is understanding."

### **Fear of Lord Contrasts [7:26-8:49]**

Now this idea of fearing God, we can understand pretty well by thinking about what it's contrasted to. Fearing God would be in contrast to thinking of him as detached and therefore to be ignored. Fear of God would be in contrast to thinking him incompetent and, therefore, be treated with disdain. Fear of God would be in contrast to thinking of him as limited or impotent and therefore to be scorned. Fear of God is in contrast to thinking of him as corrupt and, therefore to be admonished. Fearing God would be in contrast to thinking of him as short-sighted and, therefore to be advised. Fearing God would be in contrast to thinking of him as petty and therefore to be resented.

Fearing God has this idea of taking God seriously; we need to do that lest we fall into any of those other traps of thinking of him as less than God.

### **Fear of Adonai [lord, master] [8:49-11:28]**

Now it's interesting that when this verse talks about the fear of God, it talks about the fear of Adonai, not the fear of Yahweh. This is a really interesting choice. It's not fear of Elohim; it's fear of Adonai. This is the only occurrence of Adonai in the book. Adonai in Hebrew can be used just to refer to an authority figure, whether it's a human or whether it's God. It's often used as a title for Yahweh, but it's often used in connection with Yahweh himself. So, it's very interesting here. We have not fear of Shaddai, not fear of Elohim, not fear of Yahweh, but fear of Adonai.

It's also put in the mouth of God. This is God speaking. "He said to the human race, the fear of Adonai, that is wisdom." So, it's God himself speaking that way. Nowhere else in the Old Testament does God refer to himself simply by the title Adonai, without some other label connected to it. So, this is a really interesting choice of words here. This is part of what we do when we analyze texts. We assume that the choice of words is meaningful, intentional, and purposeful, and so, we consider them carefully.

Now, again, Adonai draws out the issue of authority. It has the sense of Lord or master. And it draws out the element of submission to authority. That's something that's very needed in this context, submitting to this God, by fearing him. So, unlike the similar saying in Proverbs where "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." Here, "The fear of Adonai is wisdom." It's wise to trust God as the path to wisdom. The definite form with a definite article is used both in verses 12 and 20--"The wisdom."

Fear of the Lord then finally is paralleled with an ethical exhortation "to shun evil." It's not paralleled to ritual observance. So again, that's something that we need to be aware of.

### **Rhetorical Role of Job 28 Hymn to Wisdom [11:28-13:08]**

So, what's the rhetorical role of chapter 28? First of all, it transitions us from the dialogues to the discourses. So, it has that rather mechanical role. Second, it transitions from the Challenger's contention not a good idea to bring prosperity to righteous people, to Job's contention, not a good policy for righteous people to suffer, and the second part of the book is going to deal with Job's contention.

Thirdly, it shifts the book from a search for justice to the source of wisdom and the understanding of the importance of wisdom in the equation. Job and his friends have left wisdom out of the equation. As they understand order, it's been all about justice, but now it transitions to being all about wisdom.

Fourthly, Job has demonstrated that he has a disinterested righteousness contrary to the Challenger's suspicion. And so, now we're ready to move on. The book has yet to deal with Job's challenge. So, the question now that's on the table, as we move into the next section, connected to Job's challenge, is: can there be coherence when righteous people suffer? That's, again, in contrast to the Challenger's contention where the question was about disinterested righteousness.

### **Coherence with the Righteous Suffering? [13:08-13:50]**

Here, can there be coherence when righteous people suffer? It serves notice that Job is not in a position of control and that his expectation should not dictate the direction in which the situation proceeds. God's wisdom rules. It serves to notice that the friends' perception of coherence is flawed and simplistic. Following the friend's advice would not have brought coherence to Job's world. So, wisdom should be understood as that which brings order and coherence.

### **God as Source/Author of Wisdom/Order [13:50-15:06]**

God is the author of order and the foundation for coherence, but one would not speak of God himself alone as coherent or orderly. God was exercising wisdom when creating, but to say that God is wise understates God's nature. Just like we mentioned near the beginning of this whole course, the idea that God is just somehow making him

seem contingent on some outside criteria. It's the same thing here. Certainly, God acts wisely. God is the source of wisdom. That's the most important connection. God is the source of justice, and God is a source of wisdom.

So, affirmation such as God is wise, or God is good, or God is holy are misleading because the adjectives themselves actually find their definition in God. One may as well say that God is God. Any wisdom we might find has its foundations in him. The poem does not suggest that God is wisdom or that he has wisdom.

### **Fear Expressed in Trust [15:06-16:05]**

We express our fear of the Lord when we trust him, with our circumstances as uncomfortable or as confusing as they might be. We trust him enough to accept that there need not be an explanation. We trust that his just nature is unassailable. Even though there is no identifiable justice in the circumstances in which we find ourselves. We trust that he has set up the system in the very best way, which means wisest way possible. Even when we are suffering the consequences of a system broken by the fall, we trust his love for us. We trust that even in our difficulties, he can show his love and strengthen us through trials.

### **Conclusion on the Significance of Job 28 Hymn of Wisdom [16:05-16:44]**

Chapter 28 is one of the key chapters of the book. We need to attend to it carefully so that we glean its message. So, it has a structural role and, therefore, a rhetorical role, but it also has a significant role in the theological message that the book has to present, as it helps us to think about God in the right ways in relationship to the world.

This is Dr. John Walton and his teaching on the Book of Job. This is session 17, Conclusion of the Dialogue Series, Wisdom Interlude Chapter 28. [16:44]



**The Book of Job**  
**Session 18: Job's Discourse, Job 29-31**  
**By John Walton**

This is Dr. John Walton and his teaching on the Book of Job. This is session 18, Job's Discourse, Job 29-31.

**Introduction to Discourse Section in Job [00:24-00:58]**

The discourse section of the Book of Job is made up of three major discourses, one by Job, one by Elihu, and one by Yahweh. But already that's misleading because each of them has several speeches, and therefore we have complex discourses. Job has three speeches. Elihu's has four, and Yahweh's has two. This is a very interesting offsetting pattern where it makes it seem like Elihu is the main speaker. But, of course, that's not the case.

**Job's Three Speeches Summarized (Job 29-31) [00:58-2:39]**

So, in this segment, we're going to take a look at Job's discourses, his three speeches, in the discourse section. In summary, in chapter 29, Job is thinking about the coherence of the past. Ah, the good old days when everything was comfortable and right with the world. The retribution principle was working, and he was a happy camper, fearing God, and everything was going well. That's chapter 29.

Chapter 30 describes the incoherence of the present. Here we find a very poignant statement by Job about how he is treated. He is obviously not just hanging around at the dung pile; he's around town and things like that. People despise him and they reject him. He's ostracized in every way. So, the incoherence of the present.

Job, in chapter 31, Job looks for coherence, not by revising his expectations or his focus on justice, that's really what he should do, but he's not there yet. But rather, he tries to force God's hand through an oath of innocence. This strategy is not designed to regain his prosperity but rather, still as always, to receive vindication. But he takes an approach that sort of tacitly will give him vindication.

### **Contrast with the Dialogues [2:39-5:29]**

So, let's contrast that to what we had found in the dialogues, just to make sure we're tracking with the rhetorical strategy of the book. In the dialogues, the friends were offering Job a solution to find coherence and equilibrium. They were trying to help him to know how to get his stuff back. But it came with a cost. It would have shown his righteousness to have been motivated by gain. That would have been the way to achieve coherence. Their worldview considered the cosmos to be founded on justice. In which case, coherence could be sustained by adopting the great symbiosis that we've spoken of, with appeasement as the all-purpose equilibrater. If God's angry, then his needs aren't being met, you meet his needs, and then he'll be appeased, and he'll return to taking care of you and making your prosperity will be restored. So, the idea that Job's strategy then, as the friends would have painted it, Job's strategy should be to find a path to appeasement, to regain the favor of the deity, and to have the restoration of his prosperity and blessing. That's their equation.

If Job regained coherence through that particular strategy, he would have had to adopt a perspective of self-interested righteousness. That is, it's all about the benefits, all about the stuff. The underlying issue in the dialogue section of the book was whether Job's righteousness was disinterested.

In Job's discourses, the focus changes. He seeks his own path to coherence in equilibrium. He's not going to adopt the friends' suggestions. His own path, the underlying issue now concerns the more familiar question: why should God's policies allow righteous people to suffer? If Job's purposes are carried out, his course of action will inevitably lead to the conclusion that God's policies are incoherent. In this way, the challenge to God's policies continues. In the dialogue section, Job demonstrated that his righteousness was more important to him than the benefits of prosperity.

### **Job's Righteousness over God's Reputation [5:29-6:39]**

In this discourse of Job, it becomes clear that his righteousness is more important to him than God's reputation. So, now that's a problem. He seeks coherence based on himself rather than on God. Remember when we talked about the triangle? Job builds his fort in his own corner, his righteousness, and that leads him to question what God is doing. His oath of innocence in chapter 31 is intended to vindicate him. In that vindication, he expects to find restored coherence and equilibrium. Though Job never shows interest in regaining his prosperity. He is interested in regaining his status as a righteous person in the community. But this is still disinterested righteousness because it is a status based on righteousness, not based on stuff.

### **Job's Oath of Innocence Versus God's Silence (Job 31) [6:39-10:14]**

So, let's take a look at this oath of innocence. It's one of the most important chapters in the book. What Job does is he goes through a whole list of things that he swears he has not done. They're all kinds of crimes or offenses that would have been perceived as against God and contrary to righteous living. In this scenario, Job does not necessarily regain any of his former prosperity, but his reputation he hopes will be vindicated, and his claim to righteousness will be upheld.

How is it working? Job has been frustrated, that's probably too mild a word, but he's been frustrated by God's silence. Remember, through the dialogues; he kept pleading for God to enter into court, to come and engage the conversation. Remember, Job views himself as a plaintiff in a civil trial seeking restitution. And so, he keeps calling God into court. He keeps asking for an advocate, a mediator. He wants this confrontation, and God's silence has been deafening. God won't respond. So, Job has been plagued by God's silence because as long as his experiences continue to be so negative and God doesn't speak, the assumption is that Job is out of favor, that he's being punished.

So, Job is seeking in this oath of innocence to reverse the impact of God's silence. When he takes his oath of innocence, he swears that he has not done this whole range, almost comprehensive range; he's not committed these offenses. By swearing that,

he is throwing the ball into God's court because by swearing to it, if God's going to uphold his oath, God has to act against him. In other words, he's trying to force God into action. Strike him dead, strike him dead, if he's done any of these things. What that means is that if God does not strike him dead, he's exonerated. If God remained silent, he could claim vindication. What a clever strategy. He's trying to manipulate God, or at least the silence of God, to work for his benefit instead of working against him.

So again, Job would not regain any of his former prosperity, but if he can claim he has been vindicated by the fact that God has not struck him dead and thereby exonerated, he can hope to reclaim his standing and status in the community. See how it works.

### **God as Job's Chaos Creature [10:14-11:32]**

Coherence on this level is not found in the retribution principle but in Job's personal feeling of self-righteousness. If Job wins this, if this strategy works, it leaves God's policies dismantled and his reputation in shambles. If Job wins in this confrontation with God, God is reduced to a powerful being characterized by neither wisdom nor justice, in effect, a chaos creature.

Remember all the way back in Job's lament in chapter three, Job said, why are you treating me like a chaos creature? And now he turns it around and is treating God as a chaos creature.

This is worse than the results that could have come from the dialogue scenario. There God would have been reduced to a deity like those throughout the ancient Near East, participating in the great symbiosis, and doling out benefits so that people will continue to support his needs. That wouldn't have been good.

### **God's Reputation at Stake [11:32-12:37]**

But in Job's scenario, if Job wins through this strategy, God is no God at all. Job's oath of innocence puts a serious card on the table. God's reputation is at stake. Now

it's not Job's reputation. It's not Job's motivation. It's God's reputation and God's motivation. In that sense, Job's accusation carries a threat of doing more damage to God, his reputation, and his policies than the Challenger's did. This is a serious challenge. We'll start looking at how it's resolved as we work through the other discourses. Before we get to God's response, we have to take a careful look at Elihu, and we'll do that in the next segment.

This is Dr. John Walton and his teaching on the Book of Job. This is session 18, Job's Discourse, Job 29-31. [12:37]

## **The Book of Job**

### **Session 19: Job 31.1, Covenant with His Eyes**

**By John Walton**

This is Dr. John Walton and his teaching on the Book of Job. This is session 19, Job chapter 31:1, Covenant with His Eyes.

#### **Introduction [00:25-1:19]**

We're all set to do Elihu's discourse. But before we get into that, I want to tackle one specific verse in Job's Oath of Innocence. I'm referring to chapter 31:1. The NIV translates, "I made a covenant with my eyes, not to look lustfully at a young woman." It's an interesting verse to start off his series. And I want to look at it carefully to make sure that we understand what it says. For most of this segment, I'm going to actually be reading from my commentary. This is the NIV Application Commentary on the Book of Job. I've mentioned it before. It goes into a little more detail than the book I did with Tremper Longman called How to Read Job. So, I want to talk about the specifics of understanding the Hebrew of this passage.

#### **Covenant [1:19-148]**

The verse opens with a reference to a covenant, and it's pretty much standard terminology there. The word for making a covenant and the word for covenant are pretty much what you'd find any place else in the biblical text. So, a covenant is often an agreement made with a vassal, and all of this suggests that Job's eyes are being treated as vassals being brought under control. That would be the thrust of the covenant language.

#### ***Ethonen*, not Lust but "seeking" or "inquiring" [1:48-3:41]**

Since this verse seems to be an obvious statement about sexual ethics, we have to consider the details carefully. The verb in the second line describing the forbidden activity is *etbonen*. It's a hithpael form of the root *bin*, which occurs 22 times in the Old Testament and eight times in the Book of Job. Most of these instances describe close or careful examination of an object. In only one occurrence, Psalm 37.10 is the verb

followed by this particular preposition 'al. That's important in Hebrew; a verb used with different prepositions may take on different meanings depending on the preposition.

So, we look very carefully at this one occurrence where this same preposition is used after this verb form. There it refers to seeking out, but not finding in that case, the wicked; neither this instance nor any other occurrence of the hithpael form carries any sexual nuance. That ought to be a warning to us about bringing that in.

The NIV has arrived at its translation by context, not by other usages of the word. It interprets the gaze as lustful because its object is a virgin. The Hebrew word is a *betulah*. But this interpretation does not satisfactorily explain why the prohibition, to Job's eyes, is limited to a *betulah*. If sexual ethics is really the issue, it would be more natural for this covenant to extend to any woman, whatever her status.

***Betulah*: Virgin and/or woman under the protection of her father [3:41-5:20]**

A *betulah*, again, "virgin" is a common translation, but it's really not the woman's sexual condition or status that is communicated by the word *betulah*. It refers to a woman who remains under the protection of her father. In most cases, of course, this means she has not had a sexual experience or a sexual encounter. So, she is a virgin. But there are one or two occurrences in the Old Testament where someone who clearly has had a sexual encounter is still a *betulah*.

So we have to be careful and how we classify terminology. Terms are not necessarily going to fall into the same categories as they do in English classification systems. So, the Israelites were much more interested in classifying a woman according to whose protection she's under, whether she has a husband or not, whether she has borne a child or not, that's their classification system, not whether she has had a sexual encounter or not, which is our categorization system.

So, this is a *betulah* that Job is not going to be looking at. If a girl remains under her father's protection, that means she's a viable candidate for marriage, and society at

this time was comfortably polygamous. So, the idea that Job would be considering a woman for marriage is what's being expressed here.

### ***Mah* what? [5:20-5:46]**

So, to reach a better understanding of this verb, we have to start fresh. Job has made a covenant regarding his eyes. That much is clear. The second part of the verse begins with a common interrogative particle *mah*, which in Hebrew means "what," although Job's usage of this particle is consistent throughout the book. Most translations choose not to render it in this particular case.

### **Psalm 37:10's Contribution [5:46-7:51]**

Typically, in Job, this particle introduces a rhetorical question, which seems likely here as well. Psalm 37.10, the verse we've already mentioned, uses this verb and preposition, and employs the same verb as this verse to direct to the reader to look all around for the location of the wicked. Within its context, this directive suggests that if one inquires diligently after the status of the wicked, the search will yield nothing. If we apply this observation to Job's statement, the sense would be as follows: Since I've made a covenant with regard to my eyes, what interest would I have in inquiring after a *betulah*? That is, investigating or inquiring about her availability for marriage. Inquiring after a *betulah* is not the same thing as inquiring after a prostitute. If the text truly was speaking against lust, we would expect the verb *hamad* to be used. That would be a more likely choice. Furthermore, a *betulah* generally does indicate a virgin, but virginity is more circumstantial than truly representative of the word's core meaning. More to the point, the *betulah* is a marriageable girl still within the household of her father and under his protection. One would inquire after a *betulah* in order to arrange a marriage. Such an inquiry could potentially be motivated by lust; we think of Samson in Judges 14:2, but that's only one of several alternatives and cannot be automatically inferred. In point of fact, any arranged marriage begins with inquiring after a *betulah*.



### **Harem and Status Are the Point Not Lust [7:51-9:25]**

In light of this discussion, Job's covenant regarding his eyes cannot be interpreted as a commitment to asceticism because he already has a wife. The logical alternative is that the statement concerns the acquisition of a harem. That's what you do when you inquire after a wife, a *betulah*. A large harem was an indicator of power and status in the ancient world. Job has turned away from the idea of amassing multiple wives and concubines, and he characterizes this decision as a covenant regarding his eyes in order to underscore the point that he's not even on the prowl. This vow mirrors his statement in chapter 31, verses 24 and 25, that he is not absorbed in the pursuit of wealth. Job has undertaken neither a vow of poverty nor a vow of chastity but rather avoids the obsessive pursuit of prestige.

This interpretation takes account of each word choice the author has made and therefore presents the most likely interpretation. Accordingly, the verse has nothing to do with sexual ethics, as important as they may be. Instead, it accords with Job's many pronouncements that he has not attempted to consolidate or abuse power, tempting actions for a person in his position.

### **Importance of a Close Reading of the Hebrew Text [9:25-9:57]**

So, we find that the verse reads a little differently than we might have thought. This is what can be the result when we engage in close reading of the Hebrew text and then try to see what we find in light of the logical flow of the argument. It can give us a different perspective. Now we're ready to move on to Elihu.

This is Dr. John Walton and his teaching on the Book of Job. This is session 19, Job 31:1, Covenant with His Eyes. [9:57]

**The Book of Job**  
**Session 20: Elihu Discourse, Job 32-37**  
**By John Walton**

This is Dr. John Walton and his teaching on the Book of Job. This is session 20, Elihu Discourse, Job 32-37.

**Introduction to the Elihu Discourse (Job 32-37) [00:24-2:02]**

Now we arrive at the newcomer Elihu. He's been viewed as an interloper by interpreters of the book, someone who rather roughly fits in, if at all, into the flow of the book. But I have a different view of that. Certainly, he can be viewed as an interloper, but I believe that his role is very significant to the book and plays an important part as a contribution to the book's logic.

Even his name is interesting. The other friends' names don't really feel like Hebrew names. But Elihu clearly is, and it's meaningful--"He is my God."

Remember when we talked about the triangle? We said Elihu builds his fort in God's corner, and he's defending God. And so, in that sense, Elihu is really doing the theodicy job, defending God's justice. As I mentioned before, Elihu is more right than any other human speaker in the book, but he's still not right. He's still not on target for how the book wants us to think in the end. He presents himself as a youngster in a sense, someone who has been respecting his wise sage-like peers by just keeping silent and observing. But now he's become so full of words to speak that he can't hold them back.

**Elihu's Role: Exposing Job's self-righteousness [2:02-2:43]**

And so, let's take a look at the role of Elihu's discourse in 32 through 37. Elihu is the only one in the book which offers a specific accusation pertaining to a specific breach in Job's righteous facade. So, where the friends can only suggest things that Job may have done wrong, Job, of course, has made an oath of his innocence in the previous

chapter. Elihu has a specific accusation to make, and it pertains to Job's self-righteousness.

### **Elihu and Job's Oath of Innocence [2:43-3:53]**

By the way, before we go too far into this, we should note that after Job's Oath of Innocence, the suspense is hanging in the air. Job has thrown the gauntlet out toward God by making his oath of innocence. And so, the confrontation with God is drawing to a very sharp conflict, and we're there hanging on the edge of suspense as the narrator introduces another character. It's really an intriguing kind of strategy in the book that while we're holding our breath practically, seeing how Yahweh will respond, we get the rambling speeches of Elihu. And we say, what is going on? Is this a commercial? You know what's happening. It seems disruptive. Again, some of them felt that it actually is disruptive, but I think this is all part of the strategy of the compiler of the book. He's going to let you stew a little bit on whether God is going to respond to Job or not. And so, in the meantime, Elihu has his say.

### **Elihu Parallels to the Challenger [3:53-4:47]**

Elihu's role in the second part of the book parallels, in some ways, the role of the Challenger in the first part of the book because he proposes an alternative way to view Job's righteousness. Challenger suggested that Job's righteousness could be viewed as simply a search for benefits of prosperity. Elihu is not going to go in that direction. He's going to suggest that the alternate way to view Job's righteousness is as self-righteousness. The Challenger questioned Job's motives, Elihu actually questions Job's righteousness. He's the only one in the book that does so, including God.

### **Elihu's Retooling of the Retribution Principle as Preventative [4:47-6:11]**

Even while Elihu defends God from the charge of evil, you can find that several times in chapter 34. He defends God's justice in 36:3 and 37:23. Yet he accepts the rough paradigm of the retribution principle, that's chapters 34:11 and 36:11 and 12. So, God is not charged with evil. God is viewed as carrying out justice. Yet the retribution principle

is true. Now, remember we talked about how Elihu did that when we talked about the triangle? He redefines the retribution principle, not just being remedial for things done in the past that being preventive to anticipate things that are coming up. He agrees with the Challenger about Job's motives, that's in 35:3, and his major point is he accuses Job of the sin of self-righteousness. He considers that sin to be the reason for Job's suffering. You can find that in 34 verses 35 to 37.

### **Elihu Charges Job with Self-Righteousness [6:11-8:04]**

His contention is that Job's self-righteousness in defense of himself itself is serious enough to justify punitive action against him. The Elihu variation is a judgment that may proceed with offense since it can have the purpose of drawing out offensive behavior. So, in that sense, it's almost like the suffering of Job would be baiting him in order to reveal what really is going on behind the scenes. The suffering was necessary in order to reveal the problem; Elihu's emphasis is on righteousness, not only the great symbiosis, though he questions whether God needs human righteousness. Maybe that's not even that important.

He's patently right in his condemnation of Job's self-righteous attitude. We can see that in Job's speeches and in Job's willingness to defend himself at the expense of God. That is a legitimate critique of Job and his thinking. Elihu brings those things out.

But Elihu is wrong about Job's motivations; Elihu despises the great symbiosis attitude and believes that Job is still harboring a desire for benefits. Job has amply demonstrated that prosperity at any cost is not the driving motivation of his life. So, in that way, Elihu is wrong about Job.

### **Elihu's Defense of God's Justice [8:04-8:41]**

Elihu is right about God when he insists that God is not accountable to us and that his justice along with all other aspects of his character is unassailable. We can't question God; we can't do a better job than God. We dare not impugn his governance.

God is not contingent, and we should not think that his actions are subject to our evaluation or correction. In these things, Elihu is right. And again, he gives a very appropriate elevated view of God.

### **Elihu's Flawed Theodicy [8:41-10:09]**

At the same time, he's wrong about the nature of God's policies. He continues to have an inadequate theodicy, and he is attempting theodicy. He does not seem to realize that in attempting theodicy, he is falling prey to the same fault of which he accuses Job. That is, Elihu is overestimating his ability to bring coherence on the basis of justice. Elihu is still working on the triangle. He tries to reshape it to his own use, but he's still working the triangle. He still thinks justice is the foundation of the system. He's still engaged in theodicy. He still thinks coherence comes from justice, and he still thinks that he can work out a simple equation. It's a little more complex equation than Job, and his friends were using because it redefines the retribution principle, but it still expresses the idea that a simple justice equation can bring coherence. On that, he's wrong. And it's going to take Yahweh's speeches to adjust our perspective on those things.

This is Dr. John Walton and his teaching on the Book of Job. This is session 20, Elihu's Discourse, Job 32-37. [10:09]

## **The Book of Job**

### **Session 21: God's Speech 1 and Job's Response (Job 28-40.5)**

**By John Walton**

This is Dr. John Walton and his teaching on the Book of Job. This is session 21, God's Speech 1 and Job's Response, Job 38-40:5.

#### **Introduction to the Yahweh Speeches (Job 38-40:5) [00:28-1:52]**

Now we finally get to the most important part of the book: Yahweh's speeches. This is, of course, the third discourse section. We've had Job's Oath of Innocence hanging in the air as we experienced the suspense. And so, now we find that Yahweh is going to arrive and speak.

It begins by saying that the Lord spoke to Job out of the storm, the whirlwind. This is usually the accompaniment of God's presence, but it also has the inference that he's not particularly happy with what's going on. We find, of course, that God does bring a corrective to everyone's thinking.

What's intriguing is that he does not respond to Job's oath of innocence. So, this cannot be construed as Job having forced God's hand. He doesn't defend his justice, which is very interesting because everyone else has set up the system based on justice.

#### **Complexity in the Non-ordered World [1:52-3:18]**

So, what we find is that instead, he takes a totally different tact, and as a matter of fact, when he starts, you wonder where he is coming from. What's going on? What he is doing is he's trying to demonstrate the complexity of the world. Even we would affirm the complexity of the ordered world. He deals with lots of issues that are on the very edge, the extreme areas of the ordered world, things that humans didn't understand very well. By showing the complexity of the world, he's demonstrating Job's ignorance of how it works and how it's ordered. This is important because Job and his friends have been working with the premise that they understand how the world is ordered, and it's ordered

according to justice and the retribution principle. What Yahweh does in his speech is that he demonstrates, indeed, he asserts, that there is order where people thought that there was non-order.

### **Order, Non-order, and Disorder [3:18-5:45]**

Now, at this point, I need to take a moment and explain my terminology. I use non-order, order, and disorder. Non-order is not evil in nature. Sometimes it's called chaos, but that's not good because that suggests perhaps something personified or something that is inherently evil. Non-order is neutral. It just hasn't been ordered yet.

I think of a situation where you're moving into a new place, and you bring in all your packed-up boxes and set them around the room, ready to bring order to your new home. The boxes represent non-order. Nothing's working the way that it's supposed to; nothing is purposefully placed or accessible. It's just all packed into the boxes, non-order, ready to be ordered. Genesis 1 starts with non-order in verse two, and God's creative acts bring order. So, creation is an order-bringing process. Proverbs tells us that God creates through wisdom, and wisdom, as we've talked about already, is the pursuit of order and putting things, understanding things, in orderly ways. So, non-order is the beginning part of the process.

By the way, that's true in almost all ancient Near Eastern cosmologies. They start with non-order. Then you get order. When God creates in Genesis, he doesn't dissolve all non-order; after all, there's an inside the garden ordered space and an outside the garden, non-ordered space. The sea is still there, non-order. And so, God has brought an optimal order. That's what it means when he keeps saying it is good. It is functioning the way it needs to in this ordered system. Most of the ancient Near Eastern folks talk about this same kind of concept; in Egypt, we have the concept of Ma'at, which is order.

This is the focus of all kinds of literature in the ancient world. Cosmologies and law or in the inscriptions often talk about how the king brings order. So, order is very important.

But there is still the non-ordered world. People are made in the image of God to help in bringing order. We are partnering with God, vice-regents, participating in his plans for order-bringing. So, we still have non-order in the world and we have order as God has brought it.

But then there's a third element disorder. I use that to describe these threats against order that are derived from evil. Disorder is something that is inherently evil. So, we live in a world of order, non-order, and disorder.

### **Job and Non-order and the Retribution Principle [5:45-8:08]**

Job and his friends have thought that all non-order in their lives, suffering, and things of that sort come from disorder and evil actions; that's the retribution principle. So, as God talks about areas of the cosmos that demonstrate that there is even order to non-order, that even things that are perceived as non-ordered have order, he's showing that they are, Job and his friends, that they are not really sufficiently knowledgeable about order to lay out an equation. So, in doing so, God refutes the confident formulation of a theory that reduces the operations of the world to a single simple proposition, the retribution principle. In the process, he rejects the idea that justice is the foundation of the system.

### **Job 38 and Non-order [8:08-10:44]**

We can see that when we look in chapter 38, as he's talking about the ordered world, and we start, let me see, "Have you comprehended the vast expanses of the earth?" I'm in verse 18, "Tell me if you know all of this. What is the way to the abode of light? Where does darkness reside? Can you take them to their places? Do you know the paths to their dwellings? Surely you know, for you were already born, you've lived so many years."

Notice, by the way, this ring of sarcasm. I've mentioned the idea that even the Yahweh speeches are literary constructs. I don't think we should consider God as engaging in sarcasm. This is put in his mouth to make the point.



"Have you entered the storehouses of the snow or seen the storehouses of the hail, which I reserve for times of trouble, for the days of war and battle? What is the way to the place where the lightning is dispersed, as the place where the east winds are scattered over the earth?" Notice as he's talking all about these cosmic operations, and do you know how they work, Job? But look, especially verse 25, "Who cuts a channel for the torrents of rain, and the path for the thunderstorm, to a land where no one lives, an uninhabited desert." You see, the retribution principle is justice. As the foundation of the system, rain has a role in the justice system. It can bring judgment, the floods; it can bring prosperity, bringing fecundity to the earth and growing plants.

God makes a point; haven't you noticed that it rains where nobody lives? The rain is not operating here in a justice system. God certainly can use it that way. He mentioned just a few verses earlier the idea that he's reserved for times of trouble. So, God can use those things, but they don't always operate in a justice system.

#### **Contra Retribution Principle and Justice as Basis [10:44-11:50]**

And so, we find here that God is disabusing Job of some of his assumptions as he makes him aware of his ignorance. All of this shows that the retribution principle is not an appropriate formula for understanding how the world works.

Job's response to this we find in the first verses of chapter 40. God says the challenge: "Will the one who contends with the Almighty correct him? Let him who accuses God answer him!" stand forth Job. Job answered, "I am unworthy--how can I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth. I spoke once, but I have no answer--twice, I will say no more." Job acknowledges his inability to answer God's questions. That's not enough.

#### **Ignorance is Not Enough [11:50-12:56]**

The goal of the book is more than just, "Okay, we know nothing." Confessed ignorance doesn't get us to the solutions the book has to offer. The book wants to help us develop a conviction about how to think about how the world is ordered and God's

policies. We find, of course, that Job himself has spoken ill of God. God's going to challenge him on that. We'll pick that up in the next section as the introduction to God's second speech, which is going to not just bring the negative, what we don't know, but it's going to give some positive advice, and it's going to do it through these two amazing creatures, Behemoth and Leviathan.

This is Dr. John Walton and his teaching on the Book of Job. This is session 21, God's Speech 1 and Job's response, Job 38-40:5. [12:56]

**The Book of Job**  
**Session 22: God's Speech 2, Behemoth and Leviathan**  
**and Job's Response (Job 40:6-41:34)**

**By John Walton**

This is John Walton and his teaching on the Book of Job. This is session 22, God's Speech 2, Behemoth and Leviathan, and Job's response, Job 40:6-41:34.

**Introduction to God's Speech 2 [00:31-1:12]**

Now we finally get to Yahweh's second speech. We're going to move beyond the ignorance of humans to actually get to the idea of how people are supposed to think. It's intriguing that this core message of the book is in the part of the book that has been considered most inaccessible, most confusing, and basically, people just throw up their hands and say they don't know what to do with it. Yet, it contains precisely how the book wants us to think. We're going to have some fun with it.

**Yahweh Speaks [1:12-2:31]**

Let's take a look. It starts off as God introduces his second speech in verse six of chapter 40. And again, Yahweh speaks out of the storm. Remember here, if I haven't mentioned it, Yahweh is speaking. It's not Elohim. It's not Shaddai. It's not Adonai. It's Yahweh speaking. We had Yahweh in the prologue, and now we have Yahweh speeches at the end. Again, that gives us an Israelite feel. Job has spoken of El Shaddai, but it's Yahweh who comes to clarify. And so, it's interesting that Yahweh is speaking.

So, we read his first few lines in this address to Job, "Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you will answer me" [40:7]. Of course, Job's been the one asking the questions. Job's been the one making the demands. Job's been trying to deal with Yahweh's silence. And now Yahweh is not coming to answer; he's coming to question. So, Job had all his questions, and now there's none left on the table, so to speak. Job has put his hand over his mouth. So, he's done asking his questions. Now Yahweh's going to question him.

### **Job's Questioning God's Justice [2:31-4:37]**

Verse eight is very important. He says, "Would you discredit my justice? Would you condemn me to justify yourself?" We can see then if it hasn't been clear in Job's speeches, we can see that Job has called into question God's justice. Yahweh himself says so. So again, we're reminded that Job has not done justice to God's reputation. Job has not responded well to everything that has taken place. Job has not expressed a good sense of God. So, here that's made very clear. And now what God does is he challenges Job. "Do you have an arm like God's, can your voice thunder like his? Adorning yourself with glory and splendor, and clothe yourself in honor and majesty. Unleash the fury of your wrath." It's as if Yahweh is saying, "Okay, Job, try being God for a day. Do you really think you've got this all figured out how it works? Well, let's see how well that all works." Verse 12, "Look at all those who are proud and humble them, crush the wicked where they stand." Do you think that's how the system works, justice as a foundation? He says, "It would be worth seeing if you could actually pull it off."

But now he turns his attention to the two creatures, Behemoth and Leviathan. He reprimanded Job for considering his own righteousness, Job's righteousness, as a basis for questioning God's justice. He rhetorically challenges Job's ability to impose justice on the world, right? Job thinks that's what God does--the retribution principle. God challenges Job to impose justice on the world.

### **Identity of Behemoth and Leviathan [4:37-5:44]**

And so, he introduces these characters Behemoth and Leviathan, to address the desired posture that people should have. Let's start by talking about their identity. They are not known natural species nor now extinct ones. I'm not going to go into much detail on that, but it really is pretty clear when we examine the features of these creatures. They simply don't match up with anything that we know. The element in Leviathan that's most difficult to match up with any biological or extinct species is breathing fire. We really

don't know of anyone that does that, any creature that does that. And so, in that sense, we have to look elsewhere.

### **Chaos Creatures [5:44-11:07]**

I would propose that they are chaos creatures. Chaos creatures are a well-known category in the ancient Near East and very, very easily recognizable by the ancient audience. They know exactly about chaos creatures. Leviathan is a known chaos creature, not only in the other places in the Hebrew Bible but also in the Ugaritic texts.

Chaos creatures are liminal creatures that exist on the periphery of the ordered world, almost like one foot and one foot out. They are quintessential creatures whose abstract characteristics are shared by known animals. The idea that some people have seen some semblance of a hippopotamus in Behemoth or some semblance of a crocodile in Leviathan only goes so far as to suggest that a hippopotamus or a crocodile would be, sort of, the spawn of Behemoth or Leviathan. Their cohorts and not that Behemoth actually is a hippopotamus or that Leviathan actually is a crocodile.

The category of chaos creatures is populated by, as I said, liminal creatures kind of on the edges that have been seen, such as coyote or owl or ostrich or hyena, as well as fearsome beasts only seen in the eyes of the imagination. Both types are in this category of chaos creatures. The latter group, these fearsome beasts, is not strictly zoological. In fact, they are often composite creatures. So, the head of a lion, the wings of an eagle, griffin-like or sphinx-like creatures. And so, chaos creatures are often composite, but not always.

The chaos creatures are considered to have been created by God. We see this, especially in Genesis 1, the great ocean creatures, and in 1:21. But they represent the potential for continuing non-order, like the thorns and thistles in the less ordered realm outside the garden. The thorns and thistles are evidence of non-order, yet they're in a partially ordered world.

When God talks about Leviathan in Psalm 104, he made Leviathan to sport with. When the great seagoing creatures are referred to in Genesis 1:21 they're part of God's creation. In fact, Genesis comes back and uses the word "*bara*" to create, for the first time in Genesis 1, since verse 1, to specifically attach it to the sea monsters, just to make it clear that they are also part of the ordered system. So, in one sense, we could call them anti-cosmos creatures. They kind of work against the cosmos, but they're not strictly in the realm of non-order. They're part of the ordered world, but they serve as agents of non-order by virtue of their mindless nature. Chaos creatures are not morally evil, but they can do serious harm because they just operate by instinct.

So, in one sense, we could compare to how we might think of a tornado. It's not morally evil, but it can do serious harm because it does what tornadoes do. Chaos creatures, then, are not enemies of God, but they can wreak havoc among humans.

Just as the sea is in the realm of non-order, it is controlled by God with its boundary set. These creatures are not domesticated in any sense. Yet they're under God's control.

Behemoth is actually the plural of the word "cattle," and it refers to the most potent land animal imaginable. It's sort of an abstraction of land animals.

Leviathan would be the most potent sea creature imaginable. And so, the text uses these to sort of characterize chaos creatures. And again, hippopotami and crocodiles are certainly dangerous, and they may loosely be considered as the spawn or minions of chaos creatures, such as these.

### **Role of Behemoth and Leviathan as Literary Characters [11:07-12:06]**

Now, having said this, we should recognize that the identity of the creatures is not as important as recognizing their literary role as characters in the book. The ancient audience would have recognized Behemoth and Leviathan. They would have had identities connected to them. But regardless of that, Behemoth and Leviathan are being used by the author of the book as characters, literary characters that have a role and a purpose in the book. If we're going to understand the authoritative message of the book

using these literary characters, we have to look beyond the controversies of identity to see how they are used.

### **Chaos Creatures Elsewhere in Job [12:06-14:08]**

Chaos creatures have been referred to in the book on numerous occasions. So, reading through the book, we've already seen those. Job's lament in chapter three spoke of those who were ready to take on Leviathan in 3:8. Job's first response to Eliphaz asked why God was treating him as a chaos creature. That's in 7:12. There he uses the Hebrew word *tannim*, which is the same Hebrew word in Genesis 1:21. Job feels like he's being treated as a chaos creature because God is keeping him under guard. Now that fits with what we know in the ancient Near East. The gods in the ancient Near East were known to keep partially domesticated chaos creatures on a leash and to use them for their purposes, even though they represented this realm of non-order. So, Job suggests that God himself is then acting like a chaos creature in chapter 30, verses 15 through 23.

God is not treating Job as a chaos creature as much as he's asking Job to step into the role of Behemoth. God is not acting like a chaos creature. Instead, he is far superior to Leviathan and should be recognized as such. Now that's introducing, I believe, how Behemoth and Leviathan are being used in the text. Again, Job has accused God of acting like a chaos creature, and God says, "Oh, no, it's worse than that. It's bigger than that." And so, we're going to get that explained to us as we observe what is being said. We need to analyze Behemoth and Leviathan, not for their identity but for their literary role.

### **Behemoth and Job Compared [14:08-16:08]**

So, when we open up to chapter 40, verse 15, God directs Job's attention to Behemoth. "Look at Behemoth," and then pay attention to the next line. "Look at Behemoth, which I made along with you." Job and Behemoth are grouped together. God has created both. It's interesting that when we look through that brief section dealing with

Behemoth, it goes through verse 24, so 15 through 24. Yahweh does not speak of either Job or himself as doing anything to Behemoth. In verse 15, Behemoth is content and well-fed, as Job has been. You remember 15 introduced the comparison. So, Behemoth is content and well-fed as Job has been. In 16 through 18, God made Behemoth strong as he made Job. In 19, Behemoth ranks first among its kind, as Job does. That was identified in 15:7. In verse 20, Behemoth is cared for, as Job was. In 21 to 22 of chapter 40, Behemoth is sheltered as Job was. In 23, now it's starting to make a transition 23 and 24, the end of the Behemoth section. In 23, Behemoth is not alarmed by the raging river. Inference or implication is rather, and neither should you be. He trusts and is secure, as you should be. He cannot be captured or trapped, to which you should also be invulnerable and have shown yourself resistant. Verse 24 talks about "Can anyone capture it by the eyes, or trap it and pierce its nose?" The word for "nose" is the word for anger. "and cannot be pierced" This is a difficult word in the text; it sometimes means "named" or "designated" or "penetrated." So again, the idea is here to which you should be invulnerable.

Behemoth is being compared to Job. That's introduced right in the first verse. After that everything we read about Behemoth, we should compare it to Job. That's how this section is working. Job then should be like Behemoth. Remember Job had complained, "you are treating me like a chaos creature." Here, the speech says, "well, you should be a little more like a chaos creature in this regard." We'll come back to that.

### **Yahweh is Greater than Leviathan [16:08-22:44]**

Let's turn to Leviathan. A longer section, and again let's pay attention to what it says and what it doesn't say. The first eight verses use the second-person form. "Can you do this? Can you do that?" is in the second-person form. Focusing on what Job can and cannot do to Leviathan.

With a little bit, I think more than a little bit of the idea: If you can't do these things to Leviathan, pull it in with a fish hook, tie down its tongue, put a cord through its



nose, okay. Will it beg for mercy? Will it be gentle with you? Can you make an agreement with it? Can you make a pet of it? If you wouldn't do that with Leviathan, why would you expect to do it to Yahweh? Why would you expect to trap him? Pin his tongue down, make an agreement with him, and domesticate him. Why would you do it?

The switch to the second person suggests that Leviathan is to be compared to Yahweh. So, 41:3, "Will it keep begging you for mercy?" That's what Job kind of wanted God to do. Verses 10 and 11, "No one is fierce enough to rouse it. Who then is able to stand against me? Who has a claim against me that I must pay?" Yahweh himself draws the connection between himself and Leviathan. Not so much that he is like Leviathan, but that he is so much greater than Leviathan. If you can't act toward Leviathan in this way, why in the world would you think that you can act toward Yahweh in this way?

This section never talks about what God does to Leviathan. Yet so many interpreters have gone in that direction. This does not talk about Yahweh's control of Leviathan. It does not talk about Yahweh defeating Leviathan. We've got a different sort of statement being made here.

In chapter 41, as we move through this information, Leviathan cannot be controlled, and neither can Yahweh. Leviathan will not submit or beg for mercy; neither will Yahweh. Leviathan can't be wounded or subdued. It's hopeless to struggle against him. The same is true for Yahweh.

We read the outright comparison in 10 and 11; no one, including you, has a claim against me, Job. In 12 through 18, you can't force open his mouth to receive the bridle. Do we get that? What has Job been trying to do? He's been trying to harness and bridle Yahweh. Yahweh cannot be controlled or domesticated. He is not tame. 19 through 25, Leviathan is dangerous when riled, as is Yahweh. 26 through 32, Leviathan is invulnerable, as is Yahweh. Verse 33, no creature is his equal. That implies, of course, that Job is not Leviathan's equal, let alone being Yahweh's equal. Verse 34 Leviathan dominates all who are proud. Compare that to the opening of this speech in 11 through

14, where God says to Job, you know, arm yourself, dominate those who are evil. It's Leviathan who dominates all who are proud. Job cannot humble the proud back to chapter 40, verses 11 and 12. Nor can he subdue the King over the proud, 41:34. God is also King of the proud in that sense. He rules over them. All of this discusses what Job can't do to Leviathan. They are also things the Job must learn he cannot do to Yahweh. So, what Job must learn, and it's what we all must learn, we cannot domesticate God.

### **Role of Chaos Creatures in the Message of the Book [22:44-24:19]**

So, the role of these creatures in the message of the book, first of all, they are not portrayed as the embodiment of cosmic evil. One interpreter has even suggested that they are equivalent to the Challenger at the beginning of the book. I see it as almost totally opposite of that. Neither creature is described as evil, neither creature represents *hasatan*, the Challenger, nor do they take up the role or the position of the Challenger from the early chapters. They're not described in such a way that they can serve as evidence of God's ability to subdue threats to order in the world and to bring cosmic justice. The text just doesn't treat them that way. It doesn't present them that way.

There's no reference to God's subduing them. So, how can they stand as testimony to God subduing, non-order? We have to go with what the text says. Cosmic justice is neither hanging in the balance nor the result of what Yahweh is said to do. The book does not assert that God brings justice either to the cosmos as a whole or to human experience. The book does not make that claim. That's the claim Job and his friends wanted to make through the retribution principle.

### **Not about Justice [24:19-24:52]**

The first speech of Yahweh indicated how Job should not think. The second speech indicates how Job should think. In neither speech does Yahweh address Job's righteousness or his own justice. This contains the closest that we have to an explicit message, which is what we would expect in Yahweh's climactic speech.

### **Humans Should Trust as Behemoth Does [24:52-25:47]**

The point made concerning Behemoth involves its stability in the surging waters. Behemoth is not righteous. Leviathan is not just. Behemoth cannot be moved. Leviathan cannot be challenged. Yahweh does not defeat them or harness them to show his superiority over them. They are used as illustrations from which humans can learn some important lessons. Humans should respond to raging rivers with security and trust, as Behemoth does in this literary presentation.

Humans should not think that they can domesticate or challenge Yahweh since they can't challenge or domesticate Leviathan, who is inferior to Yahweh.

### **Humans Cannot Tame Leviathan or God; Job's Response [25:47-27:10]**

Job's second response in chapter 42, verses two through six, shows that he understands the points Yahweh's making. I'll read it quickly. "I know that you can do all things; no purpose of yours can be thwarted." Again, that means Job can't tame him or domesticate him for Job's own purposes. "You asked, 'Who is this that obscures my plans without knowledge?'" Notice obscuring God's plans here; Job obscured God's plans because he indicated that God's plans were to carry out the retribution principle to order the cosmos according to justice. That addresses God's plans. Who obscures God's plans without knowledge. "Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know." Wonderful is, basically, it's beyond the human pay grade. You can't understand it.

### **Job Recants and Submits [27:10-30:47]**

"You said, 'Listen now, and I will speak; I will question you, and you will answer me.' My ears had heard of you, but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes." Again, to me, this shows that he acknowledges that he had been presumptuous in what he thought he knew. He recants, and he submits. This isn't like his first response where he just said, I'm done talking. He recants, and he submits.

The Hebrew word here for "too wonderful for me," things I did not know. The Hebrew word *pele* refers to information in the divine realm that is beyond human understanding.

On the word "repent." Let's say a little bit about that. It's in verse six, "repent in dust and ashes." It's the Niphal form of the verb. It's distinguished from other words that can be translated as "repent." Eliphaz had urged him to repent. That was the word *shuv*, to turn back, to change direction, change his behavior. Here Job does not suggest behavior change but rather wishes to retract his previous statements. He employs the same verbal form that's used when God changes his mind in places like Exodus 32:14, Jeremiah 4:28, Jeremiah 18:10, Joel 2:13, and Jonah 3:10. Therefore, all intriguing passages that, unfortunately, we can't spend the time addressing.

Many of its occurrences take place in situations involving regret. It's an expression of regret. In Job's statements, he regrets his previous statements. His characterization of God is a presumptuous belief in his own understanding, his arrogant challenges. That's how we would understand Job's regret.

The statement here opens up other issues as well. When used with the preposition *'al* as here, it typically means to reconsider something or, more often, to put something out of mind, to forget all about it. In this verse, we might suggest that that's something that he puts out of his mind. This is dust and ashes; that's what it says. It says he has, well, it says, "repent concerning"--*'al*. So, he puts out of his mind this dust and ashes. It's not repenting with dust and ashes. That's not the preposition here. Rather, he reconsiders the whole dust and ashes thing, and he puts dust and ashes out of his mind. He has therefore announced the end to his mourning, and he has accepted his reality.

### **Importance of Behemoth and Leviathan [30:47-31:29]**

We can see then that Behemoth and Leviathan are extremely important characters in the shaping of the book. This is not about hippopotami and crocodiles. It's not about dinosaurs. It's not about whether we're talking mythology or things of that sort. It's really not even about chaos creatures though they are. It's about how these creatures

are portrayed and how that stands as a message to Job and to all of us reading the book. And we'll address those issues as we move to other segments.

This is John Walton and his teaching on the Book of Job. This is session 22, God's Speech 2, Behemoth and Leviathan, and Job's response, Job 40:6-41:34. [31:29]

## 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.

This is Dr. John Walton and his teaching on the Book of Job. This is session 23, Epilogue, Job 42. [14:39]

## **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.

This is Dr. John Walton and his teaching on the Book of Job. This is session 24, Job in the Book of Job. [11:20]

## **The Book of Job**

### **Session 25: The World in the Book of Job:**

#### **Order, Non-order, and Disorder**

**By John Walton**

This is Dr. John Walton and his teaching on the Book of Job. This is session 25, The World in the Book of Job: Order, Non-order, and Disorder.

#### **Introduction [00:27-00:58]**

Now we want to talk about how we should think about the world around us. How God operates in the world is based on what we're given in the Book of Job. We've already introduced the concept of non-order, order, and disorder. We'll review that a bit here and then talk about what the significance of that is in the book of Job and in our theology.

#### **Creation: Order, Non-order, and Disorder [00:58-3:48]**

Creation was, most importantly, an act of ordering the cosmos, making everything function the way God wanted it to. That's the most important aspect of creation in the ancient world and arguably in our world, our way of thinking, as well. It's not enough just to make objects. God did that, of course. He made objects, but everything was to be brought under his control in an ordered system that served its purposes. And that goes way beyond the material. That's that ordering process of creation.

Genesis one, as we mentioned, started with non-ordering verse two, the primordial situation in which raw materials were present but still needed to be assigned their role and function according to God's purposes. We use the illustration of the boxes that needed to be unpacked. The rooms that needed to be arranged. This non-order, again, is not evil. It's just not completed in its final form. It's a work in progress.

The initial work of ordering creation did not result in total order, and that was by design. The sea is a place of non-order. Outside the garden did not feature the same level of order as inside the garden. These are all things we're just reviewing here. People were

created to work alongside of God to continue the process of ordering as vice-regents in his image.

God was not somehow incapable of achieving total order, or somehow we shouldn't think that he failed in doing so. In his wisdom, he chose to work through an extended process and bring people into partnership along the way. Even before the fall, people lived in a world that was characterized both by the established order, but also by continuing non-order.

It's in Genesis three that disorder enters the picture. Disorder, as we mentioned, reflects that which is evil, and it's done by people. There may be cosmic forces of evil as well, but the disorder in the world is largely pinned on people.

So, we live in a world that's characterized by order, as God has established it, by continuing non-order, which has not yet been addressed and is dominated, unfortunately, by disorder. The world around us then is not fully endowed with God's attributes. That's one of the most important points that the Book of Job has to make about the world.

### **Retribution Principle [3:48-5:06]**

Job and his friends adopted the retribution principle as the foundation of the cosmos because they somehow believed that God's justice was infused into the natural world and that the world operated in accordance with God's attributes. That is not the case. Again, it's a fallen world. There is disorder. There continues to be non-order. The regular operations of the world do not reflect the natural character or attributes of God.

### **Wisdom and Non-order [5:06-7:39]**

It was his wisdom that decided to bring order gradually. Now he can impose his will at any time and in any way. But he has set up a realm in this cosmos where non-order remained and where disorder was allowed to intrude. Again, recall Yahweh's own insistence that rains and floods are not automatically to be considered responses of his justice or blessing or punishment. It rains where no one lives. Natural disasters, things that we call natural disasters, hurricanes, tsunamis, earthquakes, tornadoes, droughts,



famines, plagues, epidemics as well as devastating experiences at a biological level mutations can all be identified as aspects of non-order in the world.

Some have made the point that some of those natural disasters actually have positive results in the larger ecosystem and in the cosmos. That's only another indication that God can use non-order to achieve ordered objectives. Now, of course, these natural disasters as we call them, can have a severely negative impact. God could potentially use them as punishment, but we never can know when he is using them as punishment or when he is not. They're not intrinsically evil in any moral sense, yet they're not impervious to God's control. But they cannot be considered instruments, wielded in judgment every time we see them. They don't operate independently of God, but we shouldn't picture him as holding a remote control device to figure out which houses are going to get hit by the tornado and which ones aren't. They're subject to his bidding as humans are, though we are not robots. So, there's no remote control. They are biddable, subject to God's control, yet not mechanical.

### **God's Control and Wisdom [7:39-9:08]**

So, what do we learn about God's control? If the cosmos is not subject to his attributes and if the things we experience could be used by him for reward or punishment, but not always. Then how do we think about God's control in the world?

It's interesting that we don't raise questions about why gravity worked in a certain situation. Neither should we ask why it rained in one place and not in another. We don't raise questions about why a bone breaks when we fall, and neither should we ask why one person gets diabetes or cancer and another does not. God's wisdom is founded in the world in the way that he chose to create it. It's not to be found in each expression of gravity or cell division.

His wisdom is not in the specifics. It's in the way he set the world up to work. Understanding God's control is more connected to the cosmic system than to our own individual personal experiences or conduct.

### **Justice, not the Linchpin of the Cosmos [9:08-11:09]**

Now, still, that can lead people to ask, why did God devise this system the way that he did? It doesn't always look wise to us, but that's not a question we can answer. We can say, based on the Book of Job he did not do it for the sake of justice. Justice is not the linchpin of the cosmos. Forces that God built into the world are not discerning. They are not volitional. They're not moral, and God doesn't micromanage.

There's more to the world, more to the operations of the cosmos than justice. If justice were at the core of everything, we would not exist. We are fallen creatures. In his wisdom, God orders the cosmos to work the way that it does. He is able to interfere. He is even able to micromanage, should he choose to do so, but that's not typical.

In its fallen state, the world can only operate by his wisdom. We cannot assess everything in terms of his justice. This is the message of the Book of Job to help us understand the world doesn't necessarily operate the way that we think that it does or the way that we think that it should. God, in his wisdom, has set it up. Well, that should lead us to think now about God in the Book of Job, and that'll be our next segment.

This is Dr. John Walton and his teaching on the Book of Job. This is session 25, The World in the Book of Job: Order, Non-order, and Disorder. [11:09]

## **The Book of Job**

### **Session 26: God in the Book of Job**

**By John Walton**

This is Dr. John Walton and his teaching on the Book of Job. This is session 26, God in the Book of Job.

#### **Introduction: God's Questionable Behavior? [00:22-2:06]**

So, now we're getting to a very interesting study. How do we view God in the Book of Job? You know, when you start looking at it, it doesn't look too good. Yes, and again, seeing things in sort of the most basic casual reading way, he seems to have to ask what Satan is up to. He wagers with a man's life. He ruins Job without cause by his own admission, including wiping out his family. He ignores Job's repeated pleas for some explanation of the charges that brought his undoing. He intimidates Job with what is perceived to be an "I'm God, and you are not" speech. He tells him how he made two creatures of legendary power and mystery. What's that all about? He gives him his prosperity back with no explanation or defense. Wow, really? This is the God we worship. It's easy to understand that readers of the book struggle with the picture of God. It looks almost comical if it wasn't so devastating. Is this God's revelation of himself? How do we take these leads that seem to end disastrously?

#### **What the Book Reveals about God [2:06-3:14]**

I think we have to reword our search here. Instead of, is this God's revelation of himself, let's ask, what does this book reveal about God? I would propose that when we think about God in the Book of Job, we have to begin with the idea that he, too, is a character just like Job and his friends and his wife are characters. Just like Behemoth and Leviathan are characters. They are characters, and God is a character who has been rhetorically shaped in the literature. The author of the book has shaped the character of God.

### **Revisiting the Initial Questions about God [3:14-7:08]**

Now in consideration then of the seemingly negative characteristics that we've mentioned, let's go through them again. Does God need to be informed about the Challenger's activities? No. The book presents him using conventional thinking about how the heavenly council operates to stage the conversation in the scene in heaven. This is how business proceeds. Yahweh is portrayed by literary characterization. He is portrayed as a royal figure who receives reports from the functionaries to whom tasks have been delegated. Yahweh plays that role. It's a literary motif. We don't need to believe that God actually works that way. Even if you did, there'd be no reason to believe that his question reveals his ignorance. His question is intended merely to receive a report and evoke a response. It sets up the situation. It has a literary role.

Does God involve himself in a wager with the devil? No, on numerous accounts, we've discussed some of them already. This is not offering revelation about how God operates. The literary role played by this, call it a wager, although I don't know that it's that, is to demonstrate from the start that Job's suffering is not the result of anything he has done. That's the foundation. It sets up the scenario that's going to unfold in the book. The question is the important part: Does Job serve God for nothing? All of the rest is set up, a literary setup, so that the issue can be treated.

Does God have to find out what Job's motivations really are? I mean, is this extended book to discover Job's motivations? Does God not know? Does he need to find out? No, he doesn't need to find out. The question being resolved for readers is not, will the most righteous man ever known, maintain his righteousness when the world falls apart? The text offers answers to our questions, not to God's uncertainties. God has no uncertainty about Job. The readers have no benefit in being told that God knows what Job's motivations are and that they're pure because it's not Job who is our ultimate concern. As readers, we are investigating, or we are being led in an investigation of how God's justice interacts with our experiences and circumstances. The book is concerned

with what we need to discover, not with what God needs to discover. Again, the scene in heaven is a literary device to set the questions in motion.

### **Job as a Play [7:08-8:08]**

Does God care about Job? Should we infer God's relative care for Job from his question, "Have you seen my servant Job?" Well, we can't deduce God's feelings about Job from his introduction to the conversation about Job. Everything in the scene in heaven is a literary construct, a device, a scenario designed to set the scene literarily. The characters need to be considered as characters in a play. I'm not suggesting the Job is designed as a play or as a dramatic presentation, but that's how we have to think about the characters. They are being shaped by the narrative, and their actions serve the purposes of the narrative.

### **Extreme Characterization: God as Irreducible [8:08-12:17]**

Does God not care about Job as he launches his ruin? No, we can't deduce that. The literary scenario holds all such assessments at bay. Does God violently wipe out Job's children? There's no reason to consider God as careless with human lives simply to make a point.

The extremes of Job's suffering are portrayed as convincingly as the extremes of his righteousness and prosperity. The extreme is important for the conversation to take place. Nothing less than a total loss would provide the necessary factors for the wisdom instruction that is the focus. If Job just lost his wealth and not his family, you really couldn't talk about the issue. If Job had just lost his wealth and his family and not his health, the conversation wouldn't work. You'd always say, well, he hasn't lost everything. You know, his family was more important than his health. So, he only lost his health or his wealth. Well, at least he's got family. But no, for this conversation to happen, he's got to lose it all.

This is the same sort of thinking that we use when we encounter the parables of Jesus, which examine realistic issues by constructing situations that mix realism with extremely exaggerated and unbelievable factors. Extremes then provide one of the telltale

signs that we are dealing with a literary construction.

Does God heartlessly ignore Job's pleas? Well, it's true that God is unresponsive. But the book and its teaching would flounder badly if Job succeeded in drawing God into litigation. Then God is impervious to such pleas doesn't make him heartless; it shows that that is not the pathway to a solution.

The message of the book intends to convey that message is not achieved by God giving explanations. And therefore, of course, God rejects Job's attempts to draw him into giving explanations. Giving an explanation would destroy the message of the book. The posture of God then has nothing to do with whether he is emotionally responsive to Job. That's not the issue at stake.

Does God intimidate Job into silence? Well, in Yahweh's speeches, he is undeniably portrayed as intimidating because, after all, he's not tame; he's not domesticated. But does the author intend for the reader to be cowed into abject groveling? It stands in sharp contrast to the book of Psalms, in which God is approachable with all sorts of concerns. This posture of Yahweh is necessary as a literary means rather than as a theological end. The point is not that God is unapproachable. The point is that he is irreducible.

### **Job Parallels with Jesus' Parables [12:17-15:12]**

We've used the example of the parables of Jesus. Let's take a look at a couple to make the point here. If you take a look at the parable of the workers and their wages in Matthew 20, God is portrayed as the landowner. We could not infer that God actually works this way. The payment of wages does not have a direct correlation to how people are treated in heaven. The same wage offered to those who worked only the last hour is an intentional exaggeration to highlight the point the parable is making. We can't draw conclusions about how God acts through that parable.

In Luke 16, we have the parable of the shrewd manager. The master's response to his managers, currying favor, should not be used to imply that God wants us to curry

favor with him in the same way. God's character is not being revealed as a shrewd operator. But that's the literary role given to him in the parable.

The unmerciful servant in Matthew 18:21 to 35 ends with, "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each one of you." Yet, we can't help but notice that the master hands the servant over for torture until he can repay. We can perceive a subtle difference between the message of the parable and the nature of God.

And finally, the parable of the late-night request, Luke 11 verses five through eight. The character that represents God is reluctant to help and needs to be badgered into action by the nagging of the one in need. That would be an extreme portrayal of God in order to make a point. In none of these, do we use that information from the parable to really compile a profile of what God is like? We understand that the point of the parable is somewhere else.

Likewise, God is a character in the Book of Job. Just as he is a character in the parables, it's important to examine what the author does with the character. That's more important than what the character does. The message of the book is not entailed in God's activities but in the information that it offers about God's plans, purposes, and his policies.

### **Message about God in the Book of Job [15:12-16:21]**

God's ways are more complicated than people can imagine. They cannot be reduced to a simple equation. What we learn about God is that he's not in need of vindication by us. He's not accountable to us. In his wisdom, he has created the world as he deemed appropriate, and we trust that wisdom. We should therefore affirm that God's ways are the best ways. These are the things that come out of the book, as it teaches us about God. We have to be careful not to draw information from the wrong areas of the book that would create a distorted picture of God. That's now going to lead us to try to understand the theology of the book of Job, and that'll be our next segment.

This is Dr. John Walton and his teaching on the Book of Job. This is session 26, God in the Book of Job. [16:21]



**The Book of Job**  
**Session 27: Theology of the Book of Job**  
**By John Walton**

This is Dr. John Walton and his teaching on the Book of Job. This is session 27, Theology of the Book of Job.

**Introduction [00:22-00:48]**

Now we're ready to try to distill the theology of the Book of Job. We've talked about its purpose and its message. We've talked about how God is characterized in the book, and those are all important elements, but let's try to piece together the theology. One of the ways we can approach this is to try to learn from Job's false views of God.

**God Isn't Petty [00:48-3:09]**

So, let's start with the idea that God is petty. Again, that's what Job tended to think that God was petty. Job is suspect not only concerning the possibility that he is over-attentive to God's rewards but that he's over-attentive to God's judgment. We find that in chapter seven, we find it in chapter 14.

This idea that Job is sensing very, very deeply, the idea of God's judgment, and that's fairly typical today as well. People sometimes are very attuned to thinking God is over-attentive, whether it's rewards or judgment. It's not unusual for someone who is suffering to say, what does he want from me? I've done everything that he asked! And with the idea that God is somehow going to be more exacting than we can even imagine. People begin wondering whether God is responding to some small slight or some lapse a decade ago and that God's still kind of holding that tight and not letting go of it. We have to really be careful of those ways of thinking about God. We don't want to be over-attentive or to think that God is over-attentive to these things.

We have in Matthew 5:48 that God is perfect, and he wants us to be perfect as he is perfect. But that doesn't mean that he mercilessly calls us to account for minute

deviations. That's not the point there at all. Scripture assures us that he knows our weaknesses, and he realizes that we are frail; for instance, in Psalm 103. So, we have to recognize that Job's concerns about God being petty and that we can be concerned in the same way. Really, we have to rethink that kind of view of God.

### **God is not Unjust [3:09-8:02]**

Another approach that we find in Job is a Job actually does consider God as unjust. Job's assertions that God's actions cannot be gainsaid are at the heart of his early affirmations, 1:21, 2:10. But that really is only a temporary position for Job. He ultimately tries to call God to account for the justice of his ways. Remember, he demands a hearing in court. He accuses God of abusive power. There's a subtle transition from if it is a matter of justice who could challenge him--that's Job 9:19; to, he destroys both the blameless and the wicked. That's just three verses later in Job 9:22. In 19:7, Job claims that there is no *mishpat*. *Mishpat* is the Hebrew word for justice. And in 27:2, he asserts God has withheld *mishpat* from him. We can also see that in 34:5. So, this idea is that God is not standing up to what should be reasonably expected of him.

In chapter 16, verses 9 to 14, he lines up his accusations against God as an assailant, an opponent, a betrayer, and a warrior with no pity. God's rebuke of Job in chapter 40:8 makes it clear that Job has considered God to be unjust.

Again, this is frequently characteristic of our modern reactions when life doesn't go the way we think it should go. When we see things around the world that really bother us, it's characteristic for us to start thinking that God somehow is falling short of the standards that he should be holding. But if we expect justice in every circumstance we face in life, we're inevitably going to be disappointed. And, in our frustration, that disappointment can take God at its focus. The problem is that we also have come to accept the premise that if justice flows from God and he is all-powerful, then we should expect our experience day by day to reflect the justice of God. We easily think that way.

The flaw in this thinking is that it assumes that the cosmos is stamped with the attributes of God. That's a view of the book discards.

The mistake is thinking that God's plan day by day to ensure justice is done. We make the mistake to think that that's God's plan. That's just not what he's doing. When justice is not seen being worked out in our lives, it's easy to conclude that God is making decisions but that justice is not driving those decisions. If he's exercising power unguided by justice, then he becomes like the chaos creature that Job portrays him to be.

As such, he's not bringing order. He's not the source of order. Instead, he represents non-order. In this world that features all three, order, non-order, and disorder, justice cannot reign. So, remember, the alternative we have suggested is that God's design is a reflection of his wisdom. He's the source and center of order, but neither non-order nor disorder are outside of his control. God cannot be appraised according to an outside standard, for that would make him contingent on that standard. Our place is not to hold God accountable. It's not to call him to accountability because to do so would ultimately construe God as less than God.

### **God Cannot be Manipulated [8:02-11:00]**

Job also shows that he believes that God can be manipulated. Job considers God sufficiently marginalized that he can be manipulated. Job had tried to engage God, to draw him into court, and he failed. So, then he uses him. That's the vow of innocence in chapter 31. Job no longer believes at that point that he will find justice from God. He now seeks some sort of coherence by regaining equilibrium in society. That's what his oath of innocence attempts to do. He enumerates all of the offenses that he has not committed, inviting God, basically, to strike him dead if he actually is guilty of any of those crimes and God's silence remains. God's silence had worked against Job, and Job tries to use that to his benefit. He intends to force God's hand by making them take action or that in God's silence, Job will find vindication.

In God's silence, he would have tacitly, passively exonerated Job. If God's initial ruin of Job is proven unjustifiable, God would therefore be seen to be inconsistent in his policies. If the retribution principle defines his policies Job's reputation would be salvaged while God's is forfeited. In Job 1, verses 4 through 5, we've talked about it a lot; Job's behavior suggests that he believes God can be managed. He has progressed to believing that God can be outmaneuvered in ritual approaches. The danger is that we may come to believe that God may be over-attentive in his expectations. Job wonders whether God is apathetic, violent, preoccupied, or perhaps even inept. It's too easy for us today to believe that God can be manipulated, whether through our giving, our church attendance, our worship, or our performance rigidly of Christian disciplines, that somehow, we can manipulate God to do what we want him to do. That's a benefits-oriented way of thinking, and we cannot. We must not tolerate it in ourselves.

### **Conclusion [11:00-11:56]**

So, lots of the theology that we get from the book of Job comes when we recognize Job's errors in thinking about God, recognize those same inclinations in ourselves, and then a good theology coming out of the book can help us to correct those misconceptions about God and make sure that they don't characterize our own ways of thinking.

The theology of the book goes, of course, beyond the picture of God, to the picture of suffering. And we will turn our attention to the theology of suffering in the Book of Job in the next segment.

This is Dr. John Walton and his teaching on the Book of Job. This is session 27, Theology of the Book of Job. [11:56]

## **The Book of Job**

### **Session 28: Theology of Suffering and the Book of Job**

**By John Walton**

This is John Walton and his teaching on the Book of Job. This is session 28, Suffering and the Book of Job.

#### **Introduction [00:22-1:03]**

Now we can turn our attention to the theology of suffering in the book of Job. Even as we do so, remember that we've noted that the book is not really designed to help us to know answers for suffering and not really designed to give us a model for what suffering should look like, and how we should respond to it. It's only intending to help us to think about God appropriately when we are suffering. But still, we can outline a few of the important elements of the theology of suffering in the book of Job.

#### **Levels and Types of Suffering [1:03-2:19]**

When we talk about suffering, of course, we could be talking about numerous different levels. We could talk about physical suffering with chronic or debilitating pain or injury. We could talk about psychological suffering: grief, shame, anxiety, abusive or broken relationships. We could talk about circumstantial suffering, living with an eating disorder, HIV or a neurological disease. We could even talk about surrogate suffering as we care for the aged or the terminally ill, suffering because those who are near us suffer. Finally, we could think of systemic suffering as we consider those who are threatened by repressive regimes, victims of human trafficking, hunger, and disease. We see then that suffering exists on many, many different levels in our experience and in our world. Suffering can break us, and it's characteristic of the broken world in which we live.

#### **Questions Suffering Raises [2:19-4:32]**

So, any theology of suffering inquires how we think about God in connection to suffering. That's what a theology of suffering should do. So, we can consider issues like:

why God has created a world in which such suffering can exist? Why does he allow it to continue? Why is this happening to me? Is God trying to teach me something? Did I do something wrong? Those are some of the issues we need to address. Basically, how can a God who is all good and all-powerful and characterized by justice and compassion allow, let alone create, a world in which suffering is so pervasive?

Now, of course, the skeptics have their ways of looking at that. They say we're just making excuses for an inadequate God, that there either is no God or that such a God who would allow such things is not worthy of our worship.

If we pursue attempts to vindicate God, we would have to work under the assumption that he has to conform to some outside criteria, which he does not, and that we could sit at the judge's bench to determine whether he succeeded in meeting our expectations. We neither ask God to account for himself nor why our lives, or the world, are the way that they are. There's no theology of suffering that comes out of that. We ultimately want to know what the book of Job can help us to learn about how to think about God in light of suffering, whether personal or universal. So, let's approach that in connection with five perspectives.

### **Five Perspectives on Suffering:**

#### **1) Suffering is Universal for All Humankind [4:32-5:07]**

Number one, suffering is the lot of all humanity. If you're not suffering now, the odds are that you will be eventually. Suffering is the lot of all humanity. And in that sense, it's not picking and choosing one person to suffer here and one person to suffer there. It's what we all corporately and individually experience, some more, some less obvious.

#### **2) Suffering is a Contingency of a Creation in Process [5:07-7:54]**

Number two, suffering is a contingency of the creation in process. We are not yet living in a world of full order, and we won't until the new creation. Suffering then is one of the expected contingencies because order has not yet been fully achieved. Both

non-order and disorder are responsible for suffering. God's design was to create us with the nervous system that warns of potential harm through what we experience as pain. That's how God created us. If our nervous system fails, we've got big problems. God created us with emotions, and through our emotions, we can experience hurt feelings. We couldn't be hurt if we couldn't feel anything, either physically or emotionally. Did we think it's a good thing that God created us with a nervous system and with emotions? Since we are capable of love, we are vulnerable to pain because love often eventuates in pain in this life. In this world, with these sorts of bodies, suffering is unavoidable. We have to build this into our expectations. Normal cannot be defined as a life free of suffering. That's not normal. Normal has to be redefined given the realities of creation in process. If we expect suffering, it won't seem anomalous when we experience it. That doesn't make suffering easier to bear, but it can affect our attitude about it. We have not been singled out for suffering. As a human race, it's what we experience.

### **3) Suffering Not Intrinsicly Connected to Sin [7:54-11:26]**

Thirdly, suffering is not to be intrinsicly connected to sin. Suffering can, at times, be the result of disorder. Someone commits a sin, and someone else suffers for it, but it can also be experienced as a result of non-order incomplete creation. Some suffering is unarguably the direct natural consequence of sin. Unquestionably. God can use suffering as punishment for sin, but we may never presume that our suffering or anyone else's is an act of punishment by God. Only the prophetic voices in Scripture could identify what was God's punishment and what wasn't. We have no such prophetic voices. We can well believe that we will reap what we sow Galatians 6:7, but that does not allow us to draw a one-to-one correspondence between behavior and circumstances. Suffering can, however, lead us to evaluate our lives, to determine whether we're on the right path. Trusting in God's wisdom is the strongest counsel the Bible has to offer. It must suffice.

Trust refrains from asking, Why did God do such a thing? Or why did he allow that to happen? It takes us into territory in which no navigational tools exist to give us bearings. God is neither micro-managing every circumstance nor signing off on everything that takes place in your life or mine. Yet it would be a mistake in the opposite direction to think that he was distant and disengaged.

I even wonder about using terms like "allow" and "permit." I don't think we should be using them in a way to suggest blame for God. They're some of the only words we find that we can kind of remove him somewhat, but that's our language, and it's inadequate to account for explaining God.

John Polkinghorne has made the statement that "the suffering and evil of the world are not due to weakness, oversight or callousness on God's part, but rather they are the inescapable cost of a creation allowed to be other than God." "The inescapable cost of a creation allowed to be other than God."

#### **4) Suffering as an Opportunity to Deepen Faith [11:26-14:18]**

Number four, in a theology of suffering, perspectives that we can adopt. We can recognize that sometimes suffering can provide an opportunity to deepen our faith. Whatever amount of suffering any of us have experienced in our lives, that suffering has contributed to making us who we are, for good or ill. I would point you to Romans 5:3.

We cannot conclude on the basis of biblical teaching that God wants everyone to be healthy and happy. So, we only need to ask in faith for our situation to be resolved. God may not choose to do so. We can pray for healing for ourselves and for others. We should have faith that God can heal if he so chooses, but we're not in a position to make demands of him. When God speaks of bringing his people Israel through the waters, we have to understand that that's different from helping them avoid the troubled waters. He's going to see them through the troubled times. Perhaps it's more important for us to pray that God would strengthen us to endure the suffering and to be faithful to him throughout the time of trial or crisis rather than to take it away.



It's important that we not respond with disappointment in God. God does not fall short or suffer lapses in the execution of his purposes. If it seems to us that he has not met our expectations, the problem is not in him. We should re-examine our expectations. It's important for us to try to honor God when life is at its lowest. We should strive to trust him even when hope is gone. That's what God expects from us. We're in a world subject to suffering, and how we respond to it means everything.

### **5) Participating in Christ's Suffering [14:18-15:01]**

Finally, a fifth perspective is that when we suffer, we participate in Christ's suffering. Christ was showing a different way that would bring triumph through defeat, to which the cross compellingly testifies. We should not always expect deliverance from enemies. I would direct you to Philippians 3:10. So, we can try to withstand our suffering as we imagine that we are participating in Christ's suffering.

### **Conclusion [15:01-15:49]**

None of these suggest that we should expect suffering to be eliminated from our lives. It's the condition of our world and our human plight. We shouldn't look to blame God. We should look rather to what purposes can be served through our suffering as we testify to him in our lives. So, there's a bit of the theology of the book.

Now we want to turn our attention to summarizing the message of the Book of Job, and that will be in the next segment.

This is John Walton and his teaching on the Book of Job. This is session 28, Suffering and the Book of Job. [15:49]

## **The Book of Job**

### **Session 29: The Message of the Book of Job**

**By John Walton**

This is Dr. John Walton and his teaching on the Book of Job. This is session 29, The Message of the Book of Job.

#### **No Answer to the Why Question [00:21-2:35]**

So, at last, we're ready to summarize the message of the Book of Job. Does it give answers? It depends on what your questions are. If your question is, "Why?", probably not. Job has never told why he suffered. There's no reason or cause in Job's behavior for that suffering. When we look to the past, we are seeking reasons. As we talked about in John 9, we should look to the future on Jesus' advice, seeking purpose. The former attempt to ask why about the past should be abandoned. And even the latter seeking purpose should be held loosely because the fact is even when we seek purpose, we don't always find it. There is no basis for thinking that reasons exist.

Our modern inclination is to say that, well, maybe I can't know the reasons, but I'll find out in heaven. I imagine people lining up at the reason's booth to try to get the reason why they suffered this or that. Don't count on it. Because it's not just that we don't know the reasons, and it's not even that we can't know the reasons; it is that there may very well be no reasons. Some of our experiences are the result of living in a world that includes non-order and disorder; then, those experiences are not the result of reasons. They are the result of the world being the way that it is. That's not a reason.

#### **Wrong to Call on God to Defend Himself [2:35-2:55]**

In contrast, we can seek out purposes for our suffering, but there's no guarantee that we will find them, and purposes themselves can be complex. So, if your question is why you shouldn't expect the answer in the book of Job or ever. If your question is, what is God doing? And you have in mind the idea that God has a lot to answer for what in the

world is he doing; well, no, we shouldn't expect that answer either. We shouldn't expect God to defend himself. That's the Job mistake to call God into court, make him defend himself. No, No, we shouldn't expect God to defend himself. The explanations of what God is doing are certainly way above our pay grade and beyond our discovery.

### **Disinterested Righteousness [2:55-4:49]**

What if our question is: is there disinterested righteousness? Now, of course, that's not usually the question that people ask, but that is the question that the Challenger posed, and it is the question that is a topic for a large portion of the book. That really is the most important question to ask because it is the question the book poses. Does anyone serve God for nothing? Do I? Do you? We are encouraged to do so, to be willing to serve God for nothing. As Christians, we have benefits, eternal life, forgiveness, salvation, and benefits, but we don't earn those. It's not like we deserve them. We should be willing to serve God for nothing even if we have no such benefits that we receive.

### **There May Be No Reason at All [4:49-5:27]**

Beyond the fact that we don't get an explanation of why something happened, the book helps us to arrive at the important insight that we should not think that there is an explanation. Again, there are no reasons. In other words, it's not just a case that there is an answer, and we simply can't know because we can't comprehend it or because it's being withheld. There may very well be no reason, and we have to be willing to live with that.

### **We Can't Out God, God [5:27-6:22]**

Another thing that we learn is that we can't out God, God. We must not permit ourselves the illusion that, given the reigns of the world, we could do it better. Remember, in chapter 40, God offers that to Job rhetorically. Go ahead, give it a shot. How's that going? We cannot do it better. That doesn't mean that we're therefore saying, "Well, God doesn't do a very good job. I couldn't do it better, but he's not doing very well." No, no, but we shouldn't think that we can out God, God. Such mistaken thinking

puts us precisely in Job's shoes, thinking too simplistically and mechanically about God and thinking too highly of ourselves.

**The Key Message is to Trust God in the Midst of Suffering [6:22-8:05]**

Key to the message of the book is that trust is the only possible response. Our experiences are beyond explanation. Reasons are fleeting and inadequate if anything exists at all. The worse the situation is, the harder it is to trust and the more it is necessary to do so. But that's what trust is. If we had all the answers, we wouldn't need to trust. Trust comes in where reason has failed.

God's wisdom prevails. God's justice is to be affirmed but cannot be expected to be evident in our experiences. Our benefits must be devalued in our minds. We don't live for the benefits. Our partnership with God is foremost. He has made us partners in a great enterprise of his plans and purposes for the cosmos. We need to be participants, partnering with him in what he is doing. What we get out of it has value but must not be the driving factor in our commitments and behavior.

**Abraham and Serving God without Benefits [8:05-10:37]**

The message of the book of Job: Do you serve God for nothing? Or are you only serving God for what you get out of it? Again, Abraham was asked to do something very similar. It wasn't just his son bound on that altar. It was the covenant and all the covenant promises because if there was no Isaac, there was no covenant. Family dies out, no land, no family, no blessing. The covenant was on that altar up until that time; everything that God asked Abraham to give up, he promised him something better in return. Still, it took faith for Abraham, but he always stood to gain through the covenant by responding in faith.

In chapter 22, that is not the case. Abraham has nothing to gain, nothing that will make it easier to get over that hump. He stands to gain nothing. In fact, he stands to be giving up everything that he could have gained. That's why God says in chapter 22, verse 12. "Now I know that you fear God." The alternative to that word would have been. "Now I know that you're in it for yourself, that you're in it for the benefits, that you're

only showing faith when you get something out of it." That would have been the other alternative. But now, all the covenant sat on that altar with his beloved son when he was ready to give it up; God said, "Now I know that you fear God." That is what disinterested righteousness is: being willing to give up all the rest.

So that's the question of the Book of Job. Do any of us fear God for nothing? It's an important question to ask, and that'll lead us to our last segment. The application of the Book of Job.

This is Dr. John Walton and his teaching on the Book of Job. This is session 29, Message of the Book of Job. [10:37]

**The Book of Job**  
**Session 30: Application of the Book of Job**  
**By John Walton**

This is Dr. John Walton and his teaching on the Book of Job. This is session 30, Application of the Book of Job.

**Introduction: Application, Not Action Point but Thinking Points [00:23-1:53]**

So finally, how do we think about applying the Book of Job? What have we learned in the book of Job for our lives? When I think about application, I don't necessarily think of it in terms of action points that I can do this week. There's nothing wrong with that, and sometimes we can identify things that can actually change our behavior when we've been pointed to something that we've been doing incorrectly. That's fine.

But I think there's a more important aspect of application; instead of thinking in terms of action points, I would rather talk of thinking points. How can we think differently? In the end, we don't want the Bible just to give us a quick fix for this week. We wanted it to soak into our hearts and lives so that we actually begin to think differently. As we think differently, we will act differently. As we think differently, we will be prepared for whatever might come instead of just having a little strategy for one action point this week.

**Being Prepared for Suffering [1:53-4:20]**

On something like suffering and thinking about God, when life goes wrong, we have to be prepared for that. A marathon runner doesn't wake up one morning and decide to run a marathon that day. A concert pianist doesn't walk into the concert hall in front of thousands of people and decide to sight-read a complicated piece. It's the preparation that gives us the chance to succeed. Life is no different. We need to prepare for the

contingencies of life, the things that come upon us without warning. If you wait until it's upon you, then you're not really going to be prepared for it. It'd be too late to prepare.

When my kids were young and getting ready to begin driving, I decided that it really wasn't a good idea to wait until they had a flat tire somewhere along a dark abandoned road with no help in sight for them to learn how to change a flat tire. So, we chose a nice, comfortable day in the driveway and learned how to change a tire.

Prepare ahead of time because when the actual circumstance occurs, you might not really be in the mood. Sometimes I think that way about the Book of Job. I'm not sure it's a good book to read when you've actually begun suffering because you have to work through it so patiently, so almost tediously to get what it has to give. When suffering is flooded upon us, we just don't have the focus for it; we don't have the attention span.

So, it's important that we try to learn the lessons, get those thinking points ingrained in us, and fill the reservoir of understanding, so we can draw on it when we need it in life.

### **Job is Not for Bringing Us Comfort [4:20-5:01]**

So, let's talk about it some. Does the book offer comfort? That's certainly not its intention. It's not trying to comfort you. Job does not receive comfort from friends or family or from Yahweh. It doesn't give comfort through explanations or answers. And it really, even when there's restoration, that's not intended as comfort bringing. No, the book does not bring comfort. That is not the way we should think of applying it.

### **Job Teaches Acceptance and Encourages Thinking Points [5:01-7:46]**

The alternative to comfort is that the book helps us to learn acceptance. Acceptance is found in gaining a revised perspective on our pain or suffering. It helps us to think about ourselves and our situation in different terms and to see God in new light. The book can help us to cultivate acceptance of what we encounter in life, as difficult as it might be.

I'm not trying to kind of reduce it to something that really can be held at arms-length. We know suffering is not like that. The book of Job helps us to understand the terms of God's control rather than the limitations of God's control, the terms of God's control and what that should lead us to expect or not expect. Expectations are so important. We should not expect to find comfort in explanations. We want acceptance of the way God made the world to work, acceptance that what we experience is not in vain.

The book provides us with hope and a reason to trust. So, we don't have a set of marching orders here, a remedial application, that kind of tells us how to act this week. That could confront our inadequacies or our failures, but that's like paying the bills in a financial crisis. You just try to keep up with the flurry of bills. But it is teaching us to learn, to think. These thinking points are what I call constructive application. It involves more than doing what is right. It puts us on a path of thinking what is right, of getting into good thinking habits and routines. It involves how we think about ourselves, how we think about the world around us. And, of course, most importantly, how we think about God. It provides the basis for a lifetime of inner resources that will help us to respond well to the situations that we might face. Instead of paying the outstanding bills in a financial crisis, it's like opening a saving account and having money in the bank for the future. None of us like to live hand to mouth.

### **God is not Picayune [7:46-8:59]**

So, what are the thinking points about God that we can apply to our lives and our thinking? God is not picayune. Discipline notwithstanding, of course, God does discipline those whom he loves. But remember grace; God is a God of grace.

I recently had a conversation with a person who had been a staunch Christian their entire lives. They were now in the final throes of a terminal disease. They expressed some fear that, somehow, they would come under criticism when standing before Christ that they had not done enough. This person had spent their whole life in selfless service to God, and there was a little bit of that God is picayune. Remember grace.



### **God is Not Accountable to Us [8:59-9:18]**

Another thinking point about God is something we've mentioned a few times already. God is not accountable to us. Never think that God is accountable to us. We should not harbor suspicions against God such that we're ready to doubt him and think the worst of him.

### **God is not a Chaos Creature [9:18-9:53]**

Another thinking point is that God is consistent rather than arbitrary. He's good rather than evil. He's characterized by displays of grace rather than abusing uncontrollable power. God is not a chaos creature who is powerful, mischievous, arbitrary, amoral, driven by instincts and selfishness. God is not a chaos creature.

### **Should Not Vindicate Ourselves at God's Expense [9:53-10:13]**

Another thinking point, we should not vindicate or justify ourselves at God's expense. We've already talked about these issues in the Book of Job, and we have to absorb them into our lives and our thinking.

### **Manipulating God is a Bad Idea [10:13-10:51]**

Manipulation of God is always a bad idea -- always a bad idea. We dare not try to change God. He needs to change us. Any picture that we think we can create with God to coerce him to address our desires is bound to diminish him in the end. You don't want that result. We don't want a God who is at our beck and call. Such a God is no God. We should never think that we can back God into a corner by throwing his promises at him; likely, the ones we're using aren't promises anyway. Or, as Job did, with his vow of innocence, trying to manipulate God. We can't back him into a corner. We don't want to. We must not.

### **We Can't Make Demands on God [10:51-12:44]**

We should never think that we can demand that God answer us by our specified mechanisms at our chosen times. We are not in a position to make demands. We should never think that because we consider ourselves faithful that God therefore owes us this

sort of response that we desire. God owes us nothing. We have earned nothing. We can feel free to pray for those outcomes that we want, healing, guidance, whatever it might be, but in the process, God must be free to be God. It can't be any other way. Sometimes we need his strength to live with physical problems rather than his healing from those problems. We need to accept that. Sometimes we need his encouragement to continue in what seems to us an untenable situation rather than getting him to change our circumstances. After all, remember the Lord's prayer, "Your kingdom come"--not mine. "Your will be done" -- not mine.

### **Disinterested Righteousness [12:44-14:55]**

The prayers God most delights in answering are those that ask him to shape us into people who can serve and honor him wherever he places us. So, let's get to this issue of disinterested righteousness. Job demonstrates that there is such a thing. And so, is our righteousness and faithfulness disinterested? If we'd lost all evidence of the blessing of God in our lives today, as Job did, if we had no hope of future blessings, heaven, or eternal life, that's the situation that Abraham had to contemplate, would we still remain faithful to God and serve him with our lives? Do we serve him because he is worthy or because he is generous? It's a simple question. Would we serve him if there were no benefits? We're not on a ride that has a prize at the end. We are in a relationship that carries responsibilities. Our relationship with God through Christ is not just about being saved from our sins. More importantly, it's about being saved to a calling and a relationship, a relationship with God where we are partners in the kingdom work. Our relationship with God through Christ gives us that new status, that new identity, partners in the kingdom of God, working toward his plans and purposes. The relationship is not on hold till heaven. Being in Christ is more important than being heaven bound.

### **1 Peter 3:15 An Answer for Hope in Context of Suffering [14:55-16:55]**

1 Peter, 3:15 "In your hearts, revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have." I find it incredible that we often use that verse as if it's a call to apologetics. And so, giving a

reason for the hope is giving a reason and interpretation for all of our beliefs. That's not what the verse says, and that's not what the context indicates. This is a passage about suffering. And when it says, "Be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give a reason for the hope that you have," it's referring to that situation where you are obviously suffering, and everyone around you knows it and sees it. When they see you responding with hope, they're going to want it now. They're going to ask, how can you remain full of hope when your life is in such a shambles? And Peter says, have a ready answer. It's about us explaining how we think about God, about the world, about suffering. Be ready to give an answer.

### **God's Wisdom and Our Trust Response [16:55-17:41]**

If we really believe that God is wise and we are not, then we can turn over control to him in spite of our lack of understanding. When we look to the past, we're seeking causes; we should look to the future seeking purpose. We don't have to imagine that there is an explanation. We cannot out God, God. These are the points we have seen. We should strive to have a righteousness that is not based on the benefits we receive. God's wisdom prevails. Trust is the only possible response.

### **The Shack: God is Good [17:41-20:25]**

This was brought out very poignantly in the quite controversial novel by William Paul Young entitled *The Shack*. There are lots of things people found controversial in the book, and maybe some of them appropriately so. But I found that the book had some incredible insights to offer. I want to read two short passages from the end of the book, as the God figure is speaking to the character who has been suffering. Listen to this in light of what we've learned from the Book of Job. "You try to make sense of the world in which you live based on a very small and incomplete picture of reality. It's like looking at a parade through a tiny knothole of hurt, pain, self-centeredness, and power and believing that you are on your own and insignificant. All of these thoughts contain powerful lies. You see pain and death as ultimate evils, and God is the ultimate

betrayor or, perhaps, at best, fundamentally untrustworthy. You dictate the terms and judge my actions and find me guilty. The real underlying flaw in your life is that you don't think I am good. If you knew I was good and that everything that means, the ends, and all the processes of individual lives is all covered by my goodness, then while you might not always understand what I'm doing, you would trust me, but you don't. You cannot produce trust just as you cannot do humility. It either is or it is not. Trust is the fruit of a relationship in which you know that you are loved. Because you do not know that I love you, you cannot trust."

**Rom. 11:33-35: Depths of His Wisdom [20:25-23:05]**

Powerful insights. It describes many of us. We come to doubt God when our lives are falling apart. I conclude with a well-known passage from Romans chapter 11, verses 33 to 35. It's a doxology that we've heard many times but think about it in light of the Book of Job. And I'll expand as I read it. "O, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God." Notice how it headlines wisdom and the depth of the riches of God's wisdom. But then look at the next line. "How unsearchable his judgments." Judgments, that's his justice. That's what we've been talking about. "How unsearchable are his judgments." You can't work all of that out, "and his paths are beyond tracing out." Then it goes to the next logical place. The next great step is "who has known the mind of the Lord." We can't discern what he's doing. "Or who has been his counselor." Don't think for a minute; you can advise him, tell him a better way, explain it all. And then it comes down to exactly the point, "Who has ever given to God that God should repay him." He owes us nothing. We deserve nothing. And then it concludes with a peon of praise "For from him and through him and to him are all things. And to him be the glory forever." -- trust.

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