

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.

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