

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]