

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.

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