

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.

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