

Dr. John Walton, Job, Session 2

Date and Authorship

Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Study Guide, 4) Briefing Document, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Walton, Job, Session 2, Date and Authorship, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

This lecture by Dr. John Walton examines the dating and authorship of the Book of Job, challenging conventional approaches. **He argues that the ancient world lacked the concepts of "books" and "authors" as we understand them**, emphasizing an oral, hearing-dominant culture where authoritative voices were transmitted through speech. **Walton suggests that while Job might be an exception, composed as a literary whole**, the text's ultimate authority lies in its timeless wisdom rather than its precise origin. **He distinguishes between the potential early date of Job's life and the likely later date of the book's composition.** The lecture ultimately prioritizes the book's enduring wisdom teachings over its historical context.

2. 9 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Walton's, Job, Session 2 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Old Testament → Psalms & Wisdom → Job → Walton).



**Walton_Job_Session
n02.mp3**

3. Briefing Document

Okay, here is a briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from the provided excerpts of John Walton's lecture on the Book of Job, focusing on date and authorship:

Briefing Document: John Walton on the Book of Job - Session 2: Date and Authorship

Introduction

This document summarizes the key points made by Dr. John Walton in his lecture (Session 2) on the Book of Job, specifically addressing the complexities of determining the date and authorship of the text. Walton argues that the traditional notions of "authors" and "books" don't neatly apply to the ancient world and that the focus should be on understanding the nature of the text and its intended wisdom.

Key Themes and Ideas:

1. Rejection of Modern Author/Book Concepts:

- Walton asserts that the ancient world did not operate with the same concepts of authorship and books as we do today.
- Instead of "authors," there were "authority figures" who spoke and "scribes" who wrote. "There are no books in the ancient world, and there are no authors in the ancient world."
- Documents were written on materials like clay tablets or papyrus, not as bound books.
- Intellectual property and copyright did not exist.
- This different context requires us to reframe our questions about date and authorship. "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."

1. Hearing-Dominant Culture:

- The ancient world was primarily a "hearing-dominant" culture, where information was received through speaking and listening.
- Spoken messages held more authority than written texts.
- "A spoken, heard message to them carries more authority than a written text."

- Writing and reading were not essential for daily life or societal function for most people.
- Even if people had basic literacy, it was not a primary mode of communication. "The operation of society and culture did not depend on people knowing how to read and write."

1. **Oral to Written Transmission:**

- Most Old Testament "books" began as oral speeches, then became individual documents (accounts, prophecies, psalms).
- These were later compiled into the books we have today.
- The authority of the spoken word by the original authority figure was preserved through this process of transmission and eventual writing. "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."

1. **Job as a Potential Exception:**

- While most Old Testament books originated as oral accounts, the Book of Job may be different, it "may be one of the exceptions".
- Its unified, literary construction suggests it may have started as a complete book. "it seems like it is a literary construct. That is, it has been put together as a whole piece."
- The speeches are highly literate and poetic, which are likely literary constructs. "The speeches in the Book of Job are highly literate speeches."

1. **Role of Scribes:**

- Scribes were the experts in writing, similar to lawyers today.
- They created and maintained records in scribal archives.
- Written documents were not generally accessible to the public, rather they were kept in "scribal archives".

1. **Distinction Between Events and Composition Date:**

- The events described in Job likely occurred earlier than the book's composition. "we don't have to think that the book was written at the time that Job lived."

- Indicators within the text (money units like *kesitah*, mention of Chaldean and Sabeian raiders) suggest an earlier historical setting.
- However, the literary sophistication and the intended audience of the book point to a later period of composition. "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"
- The book is written to Israelites, even though the character Job is not. "the book is written to Israelites, and we can detect that".

1. **Job's Non-Israelite Identity:**

- Job is not an Israelite; he is from the land of Uz.
- The absence of covenant, law, or temple references is explained by his non-Israelite status.
- His role as a patriarchal priest aligns with customs in other tribal cultures. "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."

1. **Wisdom Literature Focus:**

- The Book of Job is fundamentally a wisdom book, meant to convey enduring truths.
- Its wisdom is relevant to all, regardless of time or cultural background. "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."
- Therefore, the specific details of its authorship, date, and method of composition are less important than understanding its wisdom. "we really have to recognize that in the end, it doesn't matter whether we think of it as oral or written...it doesn't make a difference. We're reading the book for its wisdom teaching."

Conclusion

Dr. Walton advocates for shifting our focus from traditional notions of authorship and dating to the book's inherent wisdom. He emphasizes the ancient world's hearing-dominant culture and the process of oral transmission, suggesting that the Book of Job's literary construction and wisdom focus are more important than pinpointing an exact date or author. The book, although rooted in a specific time and place, ultimately provides timeless wisdom.

This lecture serves as a helpful framework for understanding the context of the Book of Job and helps to guide one in considering it within its ancient context.

4. Job Study Guide: Session 2, Date and Authorship

Book of Job: Date and Authorship Study Guide

Quiz

1. Why is it problematic to apply modern concepts of "authorship" and "books" to the ancient world? *In the ancient world, there were no "authors" in the modern sense, but rather authority figures who spoke, and scribes who wrote documents. The concept of a bound book did not exist, but rather writings were on clay tablets or papyrus.*
2. What does it mean for a culture to be "hearing-dominant"? *A hearing-dominant culture is one where information is primarily received through speaking and hearing, with spoken messages carrying more authority than written texts. Literacy was not widespread or necessary for societal function.*
3. How did most books of the Old Testament originate? *Most Old Testament books began as oral speech, which eventually became documents such as individual accounts, prophecies, and psalms, before being compiled into the books we know today.*
4. According to the lecture, why might the Book of Job be an exception to the typical Old Testament book formation? *The Book of Job appears to be a literary construct, suggesting that it may have been composed as a single, whole piece rather than a collection of separate writings.*
5. Explain the role of scribes in the ancient world. *Scribes in the ancient world were trained professionals responsible for writing and copying documents, such as legal texts or narratives. These documents were kept in archives and were not widely accessible.*
6. What is the significance of the literary style of the speeches in Job? *The highly literate and sophisticated style of the speeches in Job suggests that they are literary constructs rather than extemporaneous, everyday speech.*
7. How does the idea that the "events of Job" and the "writing of Job" have separate dates complicate dating the book? *The events of Job may have occurred in an early time period, but the literary composition of the book may have happened much later, meaning it's not possible to determine the composition date solely from details of Job's life.*

8. Why is the fact that Job is a non-Israelite important when considering the content of the book? *Since Job is not an Israelite, the absence of references to covenant, law, and temple are not indicators of the book's date, but rather reflect that Job lived in a non-Israelite culture.*
9. Why does the lecture argue that it's likely the Book of Job was written to Israelites? *The lecture notes there are certain orientations within the book that suggest it was written to an Israelite audience, even though the main character is not an Israelite.*
10. Why does the lecture ultimately conclude that the date and authorship of Job don't matter? *The Book of Job is a wisdom book meant to teach timeless truths; thus, its value doesn't depend on knowing its date or specific authorship. The focus should be on the wisdom teachings, not its historical origins.*

Answer Key

1. *In the ancient world, there were no "authors" in the modern sense, but rather authority figures who spoke, and scribes who wrote documents. The concept of a bound book did not exist, but rather writings were on clay tablets or papyrus.*
2. *A hearing-dominant culture is one where information is primarily received through speaking and hearing, with spoken messages carrying more authority than written texts. Literacy was not widespread or necessary for societal function.*
3. *Most Old Testament books began as oral speech, which eventually became documents such as individual accounts, prophecies, and psalms, before being compiled into the books we know today.*
4. *The Book of Job appears to be a literary construct, suggesting that it may have been composed as a single, whole piece rather than a collection of separate writings.*
5. *Scribes in the ancient world were trained professionals responsible for writing and copying documents, such as legal texts or narratives. These documents were kept in archives and were not widely accessible.*
6. *The highly literate and sophisticated style of the speeches in Job suggests that they are literary constructs rather than extemporaneous, everyday speech.*
7. *The events of Job may have occurred in an early time period, but the literary composition of the book may have happened much later, meaning it's not possible to determine the composition date solely from details of Job's life.*

8. *Since Job is not an Israelite, the absence of references to covenant, law, and temple are not indicators of the book's date, but rather reflect that Job lived in a non-Israelite culture.*
9. *The lecture notes there are certain orientations within the book that suggest it was written to an Israelite audience, even though the main character is not an Israelite.*
10. *The Book of Job is a wisdom book meant to teach timeless truths; thus, its value doesn't depend on knowing its date or specific authorship. The focus should be on the wisdom teachings, not its historical origins.*

Essay Questions

1. Discuss the differences between the ancient world's understanding of "authorship" and the modern concept of authorship, using the Book of Job as a case study.
2. How does the understanding of the ancient world as a "hearing-dominant" culture affect our interpretation of the composition of the Old Testament, including the Book of Job?
3. Analyze the arguments for and against the idea that the Book of Job was composed as a complete literary work from the beginning, as opposed to being compiled from oral traditions or separate documents.
4. Explore the ways in which the Book of Job, though focused on a non-Israelite character, reveals an Israelite orientation, and discuss the implications for understanding the purpose of the text.
5. How does the lecture's emphasis on the Book of Job as wisdom literature shape our understanding of its message and how it should be interpreted, particularly in relation to its historical context?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Author (Modern Sense):** An individual who creates a work, often with ownership rights and intellectual property claims.
- **Authority Figure:** In the ancient world, an individual who speaks with recognized legitimacy and whose words carry weight.
- **Book (Ancient Sense):** Not a bound volume, but a document or collection of writings on materials like clay tablets or papyrus.
- **Book (Modern Sense):** A bound collection of pages containing written or printed material.
- **Composition:** The act of forming a literary work, whether in written or oral form.
- **Document:** A written or inscribed record of information on a physical medium, such as a tablet or papyrus.
- **Hearing-Dominant Culture:** A society that primarily relies on spoken communication for receiving and transmitting information, where spoken words hold more authority than written texts.
- **Kesitah:** An ancient unit of money mentioned in the Book of Job, indicative of an earlier time period.
- **Literary Construct:** A work created through conscious and deliberate arrangement of language and form, often with sophisticated literary techniques.
- **Scribe:** A trained professional in the ancient world whose job was to write and copy documents.
- **Wisdom Literature:** A genre of writing that focuses on practical advice, universal truths, and moral teachings, often with a timeless quality.

5. FAQs on Walton, Job, Session 2, Date and Authorship, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

FAQ on the Book of Job: Date, Authorship, and Interpretation

1. **Why is it problematic to ask about the "author" and "date" of the Book of Job in the traditional sense?** In the ancient world, the concepts of "authors" and "books" as we understand them today didn't exist. Instead of authors, there were authority figures who spoke, and scribes who wrote down documents, not books. The focus was on the authoritative voice of the speaker, which was more important than a written text. Also, writings were often kept in archives and not publicly circulated like books today, and were primarily used by scribes for copying. Thus, applying our modern concepts of authorship to the ancient world, where the book likely originated from oral tradition, creates a mismatch.
2. **What is meant by the ancient world being a "hearing-dominant culture," and how does that relate to the Book of Job?** A "hearing-dominant culture" is one where information was primarily received through speaking and hearing, not reading. Spoken words carried more authority than written texts. Therefore, the tradition behind the Book of Job likely began with an oral narrative that may have been transmitted for a long time before being written down. While writing existed, it wasn't as essential to culture or society as it is today. The Book of Job's sophisticated, literary speeches are a sign that it may have been a carefully constructed piece of literature rather than a purely organic oral tradition.
3. **Did the Book of Job start as a book, or did it come from oral traditions?** Most books in the Old Testament began as oral speech, which then became documents (individual accounts, prophecies, or psalms) before finally being compiled into books. However, the Book of Job may be an exception. Its highly structured literary nature suggests that it might have been composed as a whole piece from the beginning, rather than pieced together from various independent texts. It's possible the narrative tradition existed before, but the book may be a literary construct.

4. **If Job, as a person, might be from an earlier time period, does that mean the Book of Job was also written during that time?** No, the date of the events in Job's life does not necessarily correspond to the date of the book's composition. The book contains indicators suggesting Job lived in an earlier time, for example the use of a "kesitah" as a monetary unit and mentions of Chaldean and Sabeen raiders. However, the literary focus of the book seems to point towards a later period of composition. Thus, the person Job might be early, but the book may be a later literary work created for an audience with a different time perspective.
5. **Why isn't the absence of references to the Mosaic Covenant, law, or temple within the book of Job evidence that it was written before these institutions existed?** Job is clearly identified as a non-Israelite from the land of Uz. As such, we would not expect the book to mention concepts that were specific to Israelite culture and religion. The fact that Job acts as a patriarchal priest is appropriate within his non-Israelite tribal setting, making the absence of Israelite religious institutions irrelevant in dating the events of Job's life.
6. **If Job is a non-Israelite, why is the book considered to be written for Israelites?** Despite Job's non-Israelite identity, the book is intended for an Israelite audience. The speaker suggests that there are certain elements and orientations within the book that point towards this purpose, even though the main character is not part of the Israelite community. Further explanation of these elements is expected to be discussed in later lectures.
7. **Given the complexities of its origin, does the date and authorship of the Book of Job really matter for our understanding of it?** Ultimately, the specific date and authorship do not make a difference in how we understand and read the book. The Book of Job is a wisdom book, and the essence of wisdom is that the truths it conveys are timeless. Thus, whether the book was written or based on oral tradition, was originally one piece or a compilation of texts, or is early or late, these considerations are secondary. The wisdom teaching is what carries the most weight and is the main focus of the study.
8. **What are we supposed to focus on when studying the Book of Job, if not its date and authorship?** The primary focus when studying the Book of Job should be on its wisdom teaching. This involves understanding its timeless truths, the nature of suffering, the character of God, and how these themes apply to any individual at any time. The book's authority and significance lie in its wisdom, and these truths are independent of its origins.