

## **Dr. John Walton, Job, Session 4**

### **Genre and Structure (nature of Wisdom)**

### **Resources from NotebookLM**

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

#### **1. Abstract of Walton, Job, Session 4, Genre and Structure (nature of Wisdom) Biblicalelearning.org, BeL**

This excerpt from Dr. John Walton's lecture on the Book of Job argues that the book functions as a **thought experiment**, not a historical account. Walton proposes that its **unique genre**, blending elements of wisdom literature, dialogue, and discourse, serves to explore the problem of suffering by pushing events to **extreme scenarios**. He suggests that even seemingly historical elements, like the heavenly scene, are **literary constructs** designed to facilitate this exploration of wisdom, not to depict God's literal actions. The book's **structure**, with its prologue, epilogue, hymn to wisdom, dialogues, and discourses, contributes to its overall rhetorical strategy, guiding the reader toward a deeper understanding of its central message.

**2. 17 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Walton's, Job, Session 4 – 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  
n04.mp3**

### 3. Briefing Document

Okay, here's a detailed briefing document summarizing the main themes and ideas from the provided excerpt of John Walton's lecture on the Book of Job, Session 4:

#### Briefing Document: John Walton on the Book of Job - Session 4

##### Main Themes and Key Ideas:

##### 1. Genre and Its Importance (0:57-4:16):

- **Genre as a Guide:** Walton emphasizes that understanding a text's genre is crucial for proper interpretation. Different genres (e.g., mystery, biography, editorial, comic strip) require different reading strategies.
- **Genre as Community:** Genre identification places a literary work within a community of similar works, providing strategies based on that group.
- **The Problem with Job:** While the Book of Job is broadly categorized as wisdom literature, it lacks a specific genre within that category. It incorporates elements of various wisdom genres like proverbs, dialogues, and hymns, but stands alone as a whole with no real parallel in the ancient world.
- Quote: *"But what genre does or an identification of genre positions a piece of literature in a community of like literature. It identifies the things that are like it, and by doing so, it gives us strategies for reading that are based on the group as a whole."*
- Quote: *"There's nothing like it. There is no community of literature other than the broad scope of wisdom."*

##### 1. Job as a Thought Experiment (4:16-5:57):

- **Proposed Genre:** Walton proposes that the Book of Job functions as a "thought experiment," akin to a carefully constructed scenario designed to explore a specific issue.
- **Not a Historical Account:** The events are not necessarily meant to be taken as literal historical events, but rather as an imaginative tool to explore philosophical questions.
- **Analogy to Parables:** Like Jesus' parables, Job uses a realistic scenario to address specific points, but is not a real, historical record.

- Quote: *"In a thought experiment, it's sort of a what-if scenario. What if we had this kind of situation? The point is not to claim that the events in the thought experiment did happen, but they draw their philosophical strength from their realistic nature of the imaginative device."*

#### 1. **The Role of Extremes (5:57-7:28):**

- **Everything is Extreme:** The Book of Job utilizes extreme situations. Job's righteousness, his suffering, all are exaggerated to eliminate easy answers and focus the reader on the underlying philosophical issues.
- Quote: *"Everything's extreme in the Book of Job...It's those extremes that make the book work. ... Remove all the easy answers, and you're left to deal with the philosophical idea, the wisdom point."*

#### 1. **Literary Construct (7:28-11:21):**

- **Surreal Yet Real:** The book presents events that are both surreal and realistic, pushing the boundaries of what is imaginable.
- **Literary Construct in Dialogue:** The speeches of Job's friends are presented as a literary construct, not a literal record of actual conversations. They are too elevated and articulate to be casual discourse, and there were no stenographers to record such conversations in the ancient world.
- **Extent of Construct:** Recognizing some parts are literary constructs raises questions about how much of the book is constructed, not literal. Walton suggests it doesn't matter where one draws the line, as a literary construct is acceptable in a thought experiment.
- **Historical Anchor:** Walton believes Job was a real historical figure, a known righteous man who experienced great suffering. The story about him is a thought experiment exploring wisdom.
- Quote: *"The question about whether the events are real then is misplaced. They're almost put together to be surreal yet to be real enough, but more, more extreme than what we could imagine."*

### 1. **God's Words in a Thought Experiment (11:21-12:53):**

- **Literary Construct of God's Speeches:** Walton suggests that even the speeches of God in the book, and the opening scene in heaven, might be part of the literary construct, designed to establish an extreme situation.
- **Truth is in the Wisdom, Not Historicity:** The core message of the book lies in its wisdom teaching, not in the historical accuracy of the events.
- Quote: *"Remember, the truth of the book is in its wisdom teaching, that is, what's being affirmed. The truth of the book does not require anything on the level of historicity."*

### 1. **Benefits of the "Thought Experiment" Approach (12:53-14:40):**

- **Avoiding Misinterpretations:** Viewing the book as a thought experiment prevents readers from thinking that God literally operates as portrayed (e.g., wagering with Satan).
- **Avoiding Personal Applications:** It prevents readers from thinking their lives are results of some divine wager.
- Quote: *"This does not intend to convey a picture of a God who makes a wager with the devil...That is not what we ought to be getting from this book. That is not an option on the table."*

### 1. **Focus on Literary Scenario, Not Heavenly Discussions (14:40-15:47):**

- **Teaching from Scenario:** The teaching emerges from the literary scenario, the thought experiment, not from actual heavenly discussions.
- **Focus on Human Understanding:** The book encourages reflection on God's role in suffering and how to understand God in light of the world's events, not to determine what goes on in heaven.
- Quote: *"The teaching of the book is not tied to the reality of the events. The teaching of the book is built from the literary scenario that is laid out...It's not about what goes on in the heavenly discussions."*

### 1. **Rhetorical Strategy and Structure (15:47-23:30):**

- **Sandwich Structure:** The book has a clear structure: a prose prologue, a dialogue section, a hymn to wisdom in the middle, a discourse section, and a prose epilogue.

- **Hymn to Wisdom:** The hymn to wisdom (Chapter 28) is a crucial element, not spoken by Job, but by the narrator, marking a transition from dialogue to discourse. It highlights the inadequacy of human wisdom, demonstrated in the dialogue section.
- **Dialogue vs. Discourse:** The dialogue section consists of Job and his friends debating, while the discourse section features Job, Elihu, and Yahweh delivering speeches.
- **Coherent Whole:** Each part of the book, despite the different literary forms, is essential for the message, with all sections working together to achieve its goal.
- Quote: *"I don't see that any of the pieces could easily be left out in the book and still be coherent and accomplish its purposes...They're very different, but they all work together, and you can't leave any one of them out and still have something that has a coherent message to it."*

#### 1. **Authorial Intent (23:30-26:17):**

- **Rhetorical Strategy Reveals Intention:** The book's rhetorical strategy (structure) helps understand the author's intention which is the key to understanding God's message in this book.
- **God's Authority through Human Communicator:** God's authoritative message is conveyed through human communicators/authors.
- **Importance of Interpretation:** Readers should seek to understand the book based on what it communicates, not imposing personal interpretations.
- Quote: *"And it's that intention that has authority. Remember, it's God's authority, but God has vested that authority in a human communicator...If you can't get it from the book itself, you're not getting it from God."*

**Conclusion:**

John Walton presents the Book of Job as a carefully constructed thought experiment, using extreme scenarios to explore the nature of wisdom and the role of God in suffering. He challenges literalist interpretations, advocating for a reading that focuses on the book's literary and philosophical strategies. He emphasizes that the truth of the book lies in its wisdom teaching, not in the historical accuracy of its events and characters, and that the structure of the book is key to understanding the message it communicates. He also argues that the authorial intent is key to understanding what the book intends to convey, and that the readers need to find the message within the book itself rather than imposing their own views.

## 4. Job Study Guide: Session 4, Genre and Structure (nature of Wisdom)

### The Book of Job: A Study Guide

#### Quiz

**Instructions:** Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. According to Walton, why is the question of whether the Book of Job is "real" a false dichotomy?
2. How does understanding the genre of a text help us interpret it, according to Walton?
3. Why is it difficult to classify the Book of Job within a specific genre?
4. What is the concept of a "thought experiment," and how does Walton apply this concept to the Book of Job?
5. Why does Walton believe the extreme nature of Job's suffering is important to the book's message?
6. How does the identification of literary constructs within the Book of Job impact our understanding of its overall message?
7. What is Walton's view of the speeches of God within the context of the Book of Job?
8. How does viewing the Book of Job as a thought experiment help address certain theological problems some readers encounter?
9. Describe the structure of the Book of Job, according to Walton.
10. Why does Walton believe the hymn to wisdom (chapter 28) is a crucial element of the book?

#### Quiz Answer Key

1. Walton argues that the question of whether the book is "real" presents a false choice by limiting it to only two options, history or fiction, when the book may be neither. The issue is not if it is a recording of real events but how the book accomplishes its message.

2. Understanding a text's genre helps readers interpret it by placing it within a community of similar literature, giving them strategies for reading based on that group. Each genre invites a different reading strategy; for example, a mystery will be read differently than a biography.
3. The Book of Job is difficult to classify because it has elements of various wisdom literature genres, such as dialogues and wisdom hymns, but nothing that is quite like it as a whole. Despite having many similar scenarios as the ancient Near East, the combination and scope of the Book of Job are unique.
4. A thought experiment is a carefully constructed scenario used to explore an issue by presenting a "what-if" situation, like a parable; Walton suggests that the Book of Job is a thought experiment because it is not claiming to represent real events. Instead, it uses realistic elements to draw philosophical points from the imagined scenario.
5. The extreme nature of Job's suffering is essential because it eliminates easy answers, pushing readers to grapple with more profound philosophical and wisdom issues. If the circumstances of the story were not so extreme, it would be easy for the reader to write off Job's situation as a common experience.
6. Recognizing literary constructs within the book invites an exploration of how much of the text may be a construct and less of a recording of actual events. However, in the context of a thought experiment, it ultimately does not matter how much is a construct as it is a valid method to examine the philosophical ideas.
7. Walton proposes the idea that the speeches of God may be part of the thought experiment or literary construct, in order to set up the extreme situation the text explores. This proposition invites discussion that may challenge a literal interpretation of God's words and actions within the text.
8. Viewing the Book of Job as a thought experiment helps address issues like the idea of God making a wager with the devil. By framing the events as a thought experiment, it allows us to understand that the book is not intending to convey a picture of how God really operates, but rather to present an extreme scenario for the purpose of exploring theological questions.
9. The Book of Job has a "sandwich" structure with a prose prologue and epilogue as bookends, with a central hymn to wisdom and two major sections: dialogues between Job and his friends and discourses by Job, Elihu, and God. This structure



allows the narrative to effectively convey its message by utilizing each section for a particular purpose.

10. The hymn to wisdom is crucial because it acts as a transition from the dialogue to the discourse section and demonstrates the lack of wisdom in the conversations between Job and his friends, pointing the focus of the book towards a better understanding of wisdom. This passage demonstrates that the dialogue section has not provided adequate or complete answers to the situation.

## **Essay Questions**

**Instructions:** Answer each question in essay format.

1. Discuss the significance of genre in interpreting the Book of Job, according to Walton. Consider the challenges of classifying it within a specific genre and the implications this has for understanding its message.
2. Explain Walton's argument that the Book of Job is best understood as a "thought experiment." How does this interpretation affect our understanding of the historicity of the events and the nature of God's interactions within the story?
3. Analyze the role of the literary constructs within the Book of Job, including the speeches of the friends and the scene in heaven. How does identifying these as literary constructs influence the reader's perception of the book's overall message and purpose?
4. Explore the significance of the structure of the Book of Job as a rhetorical strategy. How do the prologue, epilogue, hymn to wisdom, dialogues, and discourses work together to build the book's argument?
5. Evaluate Walton's argument that the truth of the Book of Job is not based on its historicity but on its wisdom teaching. What are the implications of this argument for how we should approach and interpret the text?

## Glossary of Key Terms

**Genre:** A category of artistic composition, as in literature, characterized by similarities in form, style, or subject matter. Genre helps readers determine appropriate strategies for interpreting a text by creating a community of like literature.

**Thought Experiment:** A carefully constructed scenario that is proposed not to claim the event happened but to explore an issue or philosophical point. A thought experiment explores the implications of a situation by presenting a "what-if" and is intended to provoke thought and discussion.

**Literary Construct:** A fictional element or device created by an author to convey a particular idea, message, or purpose. Literary constructs can include characters, events, or settings that do not necessarily represent real-world occurrences.

**Rhetorical Strategy:** The overall plan an author uses to effectively communicate their message. This involves the literary devices, the structure, and organization of a text used to persuade, inform, or engage the reader.

**Wisdom Literature:** A genre of literature focusing on ethical, moral, and practical aspects of life. This kind of literature often seeks to understand and express the nature of reality, human existence, and one's relationship with the divine.

**Historicity:** The quality or state of being historical; the actual existence of something in the past. Historicity is often in question when it comes to biblical texts.

**Authorial Intent:** The purpose or goal that an author has in mind when creating a text. Understanding the authorial intent allows readers to understand the message the author is trying to convey.

## 5. FAQs on Walton, Job, Session 4, Genre and Structure (nature of Wisdom) Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

### Frequently Asked Questions about the Book of Job

1. **Is the Book of Job a historical account or fiction?** The book's genre makes this a false dichotomy. Instead of viewing it as strictly historical or fictional, it should be seen as a thought experiment using a real or legendary figure as a basis for exploring profound wisdom themes. The extreme nature of the events, particularly the speeches of Job's friends, suggests a literary construction rather than a verbatim recording of historical events.
2. **What is meant by "thought experiment" in the context of the Book of Job?** A thought experiment is a carefully crafted scenario designed to explore a philosophical or ethical issue. In the Book of Job, this means an extreme, exaggerated situation is set up to remove easy answers and force readers to grapple with deeper questions about suffering, justice, and the nature of wisdom. The details of the scenario are not as crucial as the underlying wisdom being explored.
3. **Why are the events in the Book of Job pushed to such extremes?** The extremes in Job (his extreme righteousness, the extreme suffering he faces) serve a key purpose: to eliminate easy answers and oversimplified explanations. If Job were not so righteous or his suffering less comprehensive, readers might be tempted to attribute his trials to his own failings or downplay the significance of his suffering, thereby missing the deeper point of the book. The extremes force us to consider deeper questions.
4. **Are the speeches of Job's friends meant to be taken literally as accurate historical dialog?** No, the speeches of Job's friends are literary constructs. They are not meant to represent actual, verbatim conversations. The highly elevated language and rhetorical style are artificial. Also, they are unlikely to be exact because there were no stenographers to record it. These speeches are part of the book's rhetorical strategy and contribute to its overall message.

5. **Is the opening scene in heaven and God's subsequent speeches also part of the literary construct?** Yes. The opening scene in heaven, including the conversations between God and Satan, should be considered part of the overall literary construct and thought experiment. This means it may not be an actual portrayal of events in heaven. The point is not to understand the precise nature of God's interactions with Satan. This approach helps avoid common misinterpretations, such as the idea that God makes wagers with Satan.
6. **What role does the "hymn to wisdom" in chapter 28 play in the structure and meaning of the book?** The hymn to wisdom acts as a pivotal transition in the book. It appears between the dialogue and discourse sections, marking a shift in focus from justice to wisdom. The hymn, likely spoken by the narrator and not Job, presents a perspective and insight that is above and beyond what Job and his friends have discussed in the dialogue. It emphasizes the limitations of human wisdom and directs the reader toward a deeper understanding of the issues.
7. **How does the structure of the Book of Job contribute to its overall rhetorical strategy?** The structure of the Book of Job is meticulously crafted. It moves from a narrative prologue, through dialogues and a wisdom hymn to a discourse section, and culminates in a narrative epilogue. Each part plays a vital role. The dialogues explore different views of justice, the hymn shifts the focus to wisdom, and the discourses offer perspectives from Job, Elihu and God. This structure highlights how a coherent message is carefully constructed. No part could easily be removed without losing the books' overall message.
8. **What is the importance of understanding the author's intent in interpreting the Book of Job?** Understanding the author's intent, as conveyed through the rhetorical strategy, is crucial to grasping the book's message. The authority of the message comes from God but is communicated through the human author. Therefore, proper interpretation requires recognizing the genre and the author's techniques to communicate wisdom. We cannot impose our own meanings on the text without justification from the book itself.