

Dr. John Walton, Job, Session 5 Job and the Ancient Near East Resources from NotebookLM

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

1. Abstract of Walton, Job, Session 5, Job and the Ancient Near East, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

This lecture excerpt from John Walton's "The Book of Job" session five contrasts the book's portrayal of Job's suffering with similar narratives from the Ancient Near East (ANE). While ANE texts often attribute suffering to unknown offenses requiring ritual appeasement or depict a symbiotic relationship between gods and humans, the Book of Job presents a uniquely Israelite perspective. **Job's unwavering faith and focus on God's justice**, unlike the inscrutable capriciousness of ANE deities, highlights a transcendent God and disinterested righteousness. The lecture argues that the ANE narratives serve as a foil, emphasizing the distinct Israelite theology within the Book of Job. Walton details several key differences, such as the absence of polytheism, ritual appeasement, and the concept of a "great symbiosis" in Job's worldview.

2. 16 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Walton's, Job, Session 5 – 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
n05.mp3**

3. Briefing Document

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from the provided excerpts of John Walton's "Job and the Ancient Near East" lecture:

Briefing Document: John Walton on Job and the Ancient Near East

Introduction:

This document summarizes the key points from Dr. John Walton's lecture (Session 5) on the Book of Job in relation to its Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) context. Walton argues that while Job is deeply embedded within the ANE world, it also dramatically departs from its prevailing cultural and religious norms, particularly in its understanding of God and justice. The Book of Job is written *for* us to understand God, but not *to* our specific cultural context (0:22-2:44).

Key Themes:

1. The Pious Sufferer Motif in ANE Literature:

- Walton establishes that the Book of Job is not unique in featuring a righteous person who suffers inexplicably (2:44-6:33). ANE literature contains multiple examples of this theme, including:
- **"A Man and His God" (Sumerian):** A sufferer, ignorant of any offense, is ultimately told of his sins and restored after confessing. The underlying philosophy is that no one is born sinless.
- **"A Dialogue Between a Man and His God" (Akkadian):** A suffering man is eventually restored, but no divine rationale is given.
- **"Ludlul bel Nemeqi" (Akkadian/Babylonian):** A pious man suffers, experiences demonic oppression, and is restored after purification. The gods are viewed as inscrutable, and the outcome is a hymn to Marduk.
- **"Babylonian Theodicy":** A man suffers family loss and poverty with no resolution, concluding that the gods have made people prone to evil and suffering.

1. Prevailing ANE Ideas about Gods and Suffering:

- **Divine Inscrutability:** The gods' motives are unknown and unpredictable (6:33-11:02).

- **Inherent Sinfulness:** Everyone sins, therefore suffering is always deserved. The gods may have even made people with evil inclinations.
- **No Clear Divine Communication:** Gods have not clearly revealed their desires or standards, leaving people in a state of confusion and uncertainty.
- **Capricious Gods:** The gods are inconsistent and can change their minds at any time.
- **Lack of Protection:** When angered, gods remove their protection, making individuals vulnerable to demonic forces.
- **Frustration with the Gods:** Walton quotes, "I wish I knew that these things were pleasing to one's god. What is proper to oneself is an offense to one's god. What in one's own heart seems despicable is proper to one's god. Who knows the will of the gods in heaven? Who understands the plans of the underworld gods? Where have mortals ever learned the way of a god?"

1. **Distinctively Israelite Thinking in Job:**

- **Monotheism:** Job's lack of inclination towards polytheism (11:02-12:12). He does not worship the sun or moon (Job 31:26).
- **One God:** Job knows which God is responsible for his trouble and does not appeal to others (12:12-12:46).
- **Deserved or Undeserved Punishment:** Job wrestles with whether his punishment is deserved, unlike ANE figures who often assume they must have offended the gods (12:46-14:33).
- **Personal Righteousness:** Job is certain of his righteousness, not just of fulfilling ritual obligations; this is not a concept in the ANE (12:46-14:33).
- **Rejection of the Great Symbiosis:** Job does not operate under the ANE concept of the gods depending on humans to meet their needs and vice-versa (14:33-18:24). ANE gods were thought to have created people to meet their needs, leading to a cycle of codependency.
- **Serving God for Nothing:** The question posed at the start of Job directly undermines the idea that people only serve God for personal gain, which was the norm in ANE culture (18:24-19:51).

- **Disagreement with Friends:** Job's friends represent ANE thinking; they focus on appeasing God to regain his blessings, not on genuine righteousness (19:51-21:56). Job resists this "getting your stuff back" mentality.
- **No Ritual Appeasement:** The book offers no ritual solution to Job's situation, which would have been the ANE norm (21:56-23:24).
- **God's Justice and Job's Righteousness:** The focus on God's justice and Job's righteousness is distinctly Israelite (23:24-24:51). ANE gods are not held accountable to a higher standard of justice.
- **Declaration of Righteousness:** Job is declared righteous from the outset, which is unparalleled in ANE literature (23:24-24:51).
- **Transcendent View of Deity:** The book portrays a transcendent God, not one who is deeply enmeshed in human affairs (24:51-25:14).

1. Job as a Foil to ANE Thinking:

- The Book of Job is not indebted to ANE literature but uses it as a *foil* (25:14-26:32). It deliberately contrasts its ideas about God and suffering with the prevailing ANE worldview.
- Job's friends represent ANE thinking, and the book resists their perspectives.

Summary of Distinctly Israelite Features in Job:

- **No Great Symbiosis:** God does not need humans. (26:32-28:32)
- **Interest in God's Justice:** God is expected to act justly.
- **Abstract Righteousness:** A personal sense of righteousness beyond ritual obligation.
- **No Ritual Offenses/Remedies:** No ritual solutions or appeasement are considered.
- **Divine Wisdom:** Divine wisdom is a major theme, focusing on God's policies in the world, not just his arbitrary power.

Conclusion:

Walton concludes that the Book of Job, while situated within the ANE world, offers a significantly different revelation of God (Yahweh) than what was available in the ancient world. It assumes knowledge of ANE thought to establish a point of contrast, demonstrating a distinctly Israelite perspective on God, justice, righteousness, and suffering. This contrast challenges the ANE worldview, presenting an alternative understanding of God's nature and his relationship with humanity.

4. Job Study Guide: Session 5, Job and the Ancient Near East

The Book of Job and the Ancient Near East: A Study Guide

Quiz

1. According to the lecture, why is it important to understand the cultural context of the Book of Job?
2. Briefly describe the "pious sufferer" motif found in ancient Near Eastern literature.
3. Name two of the common themes or answers to suffering found in ANE texts that are discussed in the lecture.
4. How did ANE cultures view their gods in terms of consistency and communication?
5. Explain the concept of the "great symbiosis" as it was understood in the ancient Near East.
6. Why is the question, "Does Job serve God for nothing?" considered an Israelite idea?
7. How do Job's friends represent ANE thinking, and how does Job's response differ?
8. What role do ritual offenses and appeasements play in ANE literature compared to the Book of Job?
9. According to the lecture, how does the Book of Job emphasize God's justice and Job's righteousness?
10. What does the lecture mean by the "transcendent view of deity" in the Book of Job, and how does it contrast with ANE beliefs?

Quiz Answer Key

1. The Bible, including Job, was written for us, but not to us. It's embedded in a particular time, language, and culture, and understanding that context helps interpret its message. Understanding the ancient Near East is key to unlocking the book's meaning.
2. The "pious sufferer" motif involves a person who appears righteous and devout but experiences inexplicable suffering. Ancient Near Eastern literature explores this through various characters and situations where the pious endure hardship.

3. Two common answers to suffering in ANE texts are divine inscrutability (gods' ways are unknowable) and the inherent sinfulness of humanity (everyone sins, therefore, deserves suffering).
4. ANE cultures believed their gods were inconsistent, capricious, had their own agendas, and did not communicate clearly about what they desired or what would please or offend them.
5. The "great symbiosis" refers to the belief that gods and humans are interdependent. Humans were created to meet the gods' needs, and gods, in turn, provide for and protect humans.
6. The question "Does Job serve God for nothing?" challenges the foundation of the great symbiosis in which service to the gods was transactional. This concept of serving without expectation of return was uniquely Israelite.
7. Job's friends believe Job must appease God to restore his blessings, reflecting the ANE idea that suffering results from displeasing the gods and can be fixed by some action on Job's part. Job, however, does not accept this, expressing the distinct Israelite idea that righteousness should not be transactional.
8. ANE literature often attributes suffering to ritual offenses and seeks solutions through ritual appeasement, while the Book of Job does not consider ritual offenses or suggest any ritual remedies.
9. The book emphasizes that God's justice and Job's righteousness are central and important; this is in direct contrast to ANE views that gods act arbitrarily and that human righteousness is only ritual based.
10. The "transcendent view of deity" refers to God being above and beyond human affairs, not directly involved in daily needs, unlike the gods of the ANE. This contrasts with ANE gods who are needy, capricious, and dependent on people.

Essay Questions

1. Discuss how the Book of Job both engages with and transcends the common themes of the "pious sufferer" found in ancient Near Eastern literature. Be sure to explore the differences between them.
2. Analyze how the concept of the "great symbiosis" in the ANE contrasts with the relationship between God and humanity as presented in the Book of Job.

3. Compare and contrast the ways in which the Book of Job and ANE texts understand the nature of divine justice.
4. Explain how the distinctly Israelite features of the Book of Job, as outlined by the lecture, contribute to its unique message about God and suffering.
5. Argue for the importance of understanding the cultural context of the ANE in order to fully appreciate the message of the Book of Job.

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Ancient Near East (ANE):** The historical region encompassing the civilizations of Mesopotamia, Egypt, Canaan, and other areas from roughly 3000 BCE to the rise of the Roman Empire.
- **Pious Sufferer:** A recurring motif in ancient literature, referring to a righteous individual who experiences unjust suffering.
- **Divine Inscrutability:** The belief that the gods' actions and purposes are unknowable and beyond human comprehension.
- **Polytheism:** The belief in or worship of more than one god.
- **Great Symbiosis:** The ANE concept of a reciprocal relationship between gods and humans, where gods depend on humans to meet their needs and humans depend on gods for protection and provision.
- **Disinterested Righteousness:** The concept of being righteous or acting justly without expectation of personal reward or benefit.
- **Ritual Appeasement:** The act of performing a religious ceremony in order to seek forgiveness or favor from the divine after some transgression or offense.
- **Transcendent Deity:** The idea of a god who is above and beyond the physical world and human concerns, existing outside of the created order.
- **Divine Council:** A gathering or assembly of gods, often portrayed in mythology as a court or group of advisors to a supreme god.
- **Yahweh:** The name of the God of Israel in the Hebrew Bible.

5. FAQs on Walton, Job, Session 5, Job and the Ancient Near East, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions about Job and the Ancient Near East

1. **How does the Book of Job relate to the culture of the ancient Near East (ANE)?**

The Book of Job is deeply embedded in the culture of the ancient Near East, even though it's not directly based on any specific ANE text. The conversations and themes of the book unfold within this cultural context. It's a book written by Israelites, for Israelites, but utilizes a common ANE understanding of suffering, justice, and the divine to ultimately contrast those views with Israelite theology. Job himself is not an Israelite, but the framework and the ideas presented reflect Israelite perspectives.

2. **What is the "pious sufferer" motif common in ANE literature, and how does Job fit within this category?**

The "pious sufferer" motif depicts individuals who, despite their apparent righteousness and adherence to societal and divine expectations, experience intense suffering. Several ANE texts explore this, such as "A Man and His God," "A Dialogue Between a Man and His God," "Ludlul bel Nemeqi," and the "Babylonian Theodicy." These stories typically assume that suffering results from some unknown offense or divine inscrutability, often ending with a confession or a conclusion that the gods are beyond human understanding. Job, however, while initially presented as a pious sufferer, does not follow the same path of assuming guilt or inherent sinfulness.

3. **What were common ANE perspectives on the gods and their relationship with humanity?**

In the ANE, gods were often seen as inconsistent, capricious, and driven by their own agendas. They were believed to need humans to meet their needs, such as providing food and shelter. This led to a "great symbiosis," a codependency where humans served the gods, and the gods, in return, provided protection and sustenance, albeit inconsistently. The gods were not necessarily viewed as inherently just but more pragmatic to maintain order for their own benefit. Divine communication was often unclear, leaving humans uncertain about what would please or displease the gods, making life unpredictable.

4. **How does the Book of Job challenge the concept of the "great symbiosis" found in ANE thinking?** The Book of Job challenges the "great symbiosis" by suggesting that a person can serve God out of a sense of righteousness, not just for the expectation of personal gain. Unlike the ANE worldview, where people served gods to receive blessings, Job's story raises the question of whether Job is righteous for righteousness' sake, not for any reward. This concept of disinterested righteousness was foreign to the ANE mind, which saw serving the gods as a transactional relationship. The book posits a God who doesn't *need* human service.
5. **How does Job's view of God and his suffering differ from those presented in other ANE literature?** Job differs significantly from the ANE concept of the gods. Unlike the inscrutable, inconsistent deities of the ANE, Job recognizes that his suffering does not necessarily indicate hidden sin or a capriciousness of God. Job asserts his righteousness and ultimately challenges God's justice, demanding an explanation for his plight. This position is radically different from the passive acceptance or confession of sin found in the other ANE stories of pious sufferers, where gods act out of inscrutability or some inherent need of the gods.
6. **In what ways does Job exhibit distinct Israelite thinking?** Job displays Israelite thinking in several ways: 1) He shows no inclination towards polytheism, unlike the pervasive polytheism of the ANE. 2) He doesn't question which god caused his suffering, indicating his knowledge of and focus on one God, Yahweh. 3) He analyzes whether his suffering is deserved or undeserved, a more ethical way of thinking than ANE stories where inherent sin or ignorance is the explanation. 4) He embraces a transcendent view of God who is beyond human needs or control. These points reflect a specifically Israelite, monotheistic worldview.
7. **How do the arguments of Job's friends reflect ancient Near Eastern perspectives, and why do they differ from Job's thinking?** Job's friends represent typical ANE thinking, asserting that Job's suffering must be the result of some offense to God, even if it's unknown or unintentional. They urge him to appease God through traditional means so that he can restore his blessings. They view the relationship with God as a transaction based on merit. Job's thinking, on the other hand, challenges this transactional view of serving God. Job does not believe his suffering is a deserved punishment and seeks a deeper understanding of God's actions, demonstrating that the issue is not simply about "getting his stuff back."

8. **What is the ultimate purpose of the Book of Job in relation to the literature of the ancient Near East?** The Book of Job utilizes ancient Near Eastern literature and its ideas as a "foil." It engages with common ANE themes about suffering, righteousness, and the divine, not to adopt them, but to show how inadequate those explanations are in understanding the nature of God and human experience of suffering. The book reveals an understanding of God as just, wise, and transcendent that was simply unavailable in other ANE systems of thought. The Book of Job, therefore, offers a distinctively Israelite view of the divine in contrast to its contemporary Near Eastern culture, focusing on God's wisdom and policies in the world, and how they relate to humanity.