

Dr. John Walton, Job, Session 12

Role of Wife and Friends

Resources from NotebookLM

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

1. Abstract of Walton, Job, Session 12, Role of Wife and Friends, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

This lecture by Dr. John Walton analyzes the roles of Job's wife and friends within the Book of Job. **He argues that they are not simply characters offering advice or comfort, but rather function as literary devices.** The friends, individually representing experience, wisdom, and systematization, collectively embody the flawed reasoning of the ancient world. Job's wife, with her succinct advice to "curse God and die," offers a quick solution aligning with the Challenger's perspective. Both the wife and friends unwittingly serve the Challenger's agenda, prompting Job to defend his faith. Their actions ultimately set the stage for the main dialogues in the book.

2. 11 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Walton's, Job, Session 12 – 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
n12.mp3**

3. Briefing Document

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from the provided excerpt of John Walton's "Session 12: Role of the Wife and Friends" on the Book of Job:

Briefing Document: The Roles of Job's Wife and Friends in the Book of Job

Source: Excerpts from "Walton_Job_Session12.pdf"

Main Themes:

- **Literary Roles, Not Role Models:** Walton emphasizes that the characters of Job's wife and friends are not presented as moral exemplars (either positive or negative) but rather as literary devices with specific functions within the narrative. They are "role players" designed to advance the plot and theological themes of the book.
- **Challenger's Agents (Unwittingly):** Both the wife and the friends serve as agents, albeit unknowingly, of the "Challenger" (Satan). Their actions and words are designed to push Job toward the conclusion that his righteousness is conditional and dependent on material blessings.
- **Rejection of Conventional Wisdom:** The book uses the friends, typically considered the wisest of their time, as a foil. Their traditional wisdom and "retribution principle" (the idea that people get what they deserve) are ultimately rejected as inadequate and flawed.
- **Focus on the "Stuff":** The wife and friends, driven by the Challenger's accusations, all focus on the material aspects of Job's situation. They encourage him to either "curse God and die" (wife) or focus on regaining his lost possessions (friends). Their obsession with "stuff" highlights the central question of the book: is Job's righteousness based on material blessings or something deeper?

Key Ideas and Facts:

1. The Friends as Individuals:

- They are not a monolithic group, but each represents a distinct approach to understanding suffering:
- **Eliphaz:** Focuses on personal experience. He draws conclusions based on his own life stories.

- **Bildad:** Appeals to the wisdom of the ages. He relies on tradition and established philosophical thought.
- **Zophar:** Seeks understanding through systematization. He tries to make everything fit neatly into a black-and-white framework.
- Walton states: "The book really wouldn't use three friends if each one didn't have a role...the three friends, very intentionally, fill three roles."

1. **The Friends as a Group:**

- They represent the pinnacle of wisdom in the ancient world, the "sages".
- However, they are foils: "Here they come as representatives of wisdom, and instead, they're dismissed as misguided fools." They offer shallow, inadequate, and flawed reasoning built on flimsy assumptions, showing that even the "best" human understanding is insufficient.
- They act as "philosophical representatives" of the Challenger, advocating the "retribution principle". They assume Job's suffering is a result of sin. "Therefore, when Job suffers, they easily conclude that he must be suffering because he has done some great evil."
- The friends' focus is on the "stuff" Job has lost, inadvertently pushing the Challenger's agenda. If Job were to follow their advice, it would prove the Challenger right in thinking that Job's righteousness was all about material things.

1. **Misconceptions About the Friends:**

- Their role is not to provide a negative example of how *not* to comfort someone. "The role of the friends is not so that readers can be instructed on how not to give counsel and comfort." They are not meant to be role models of any sort.
- Instead, they fulfill an important literary, theological, philosophical, and rhetorical function.

1. **The Role of Job's Wife:**

- She is also a "role player," not a sympathetic character. She doesn't mourn as a partner or mother.
- She represents the "quick and easy solution" from the Challenger's point of view. Her words "curse God and die" are an attempt to break Job's faithfulness immediately.

- She also pushes the agenda of "stuff," working in tandem with the friends.
- Job's response to his wife ("Shall we accept good from God and not trouble?") serves as an affirmation of his righteousness and provides a contrast to the approach that the friends and wife advocate.
- Her role is a one-off event, a rhetorical device to set the stage for the dialogues that follow.
- Her speech is a "prelude and transition to the friends."
- She "proposes a solution opposite the direction the friends will go," with her offering death instead of the friends' suggestion of a life with renewed benefits.

1. **Unified Purpose:**

- Both the wife and the friends act as "unwitting agents" for the Challenger's goal.
- Walton states: "all of them, the friends and Job's wife alike, serve as unwitting agents for the Challenger's expectations."
- Their actions set the stage for the central dialogue of the book by attempting to challenge Job's faith in his righteousness, separate from worldly benefits.

1. **The Challenger's Exit:** The Challenger exits after chapter two, with his role effectively being continued by the friends, making them his "surrogates."

Quotes from the Source:

- "The three friends, very intentionally, fill three roles. That's what the author wants to do with them. That's how their characters are used."
- "Here they come as representatives of wisdom, and instead, they're dismissed as misguided fools."
- "The role of the friends is not so that readers can be instructed on how not to give counsel and comfort."
- "The friends are all about stuff."
- "The rhetorical role then of the wife, after all, is a one-off."
- "all of them, the friends and Job's wife alike, serve as unwitting agents for the Challenger's expectations."

Conclusion:

John Walton emphasizes that understanding the roles of Job's wife and friends requires interpreting them within the framework of the literary and theological aims of the book. They are not to be understood as simply good or bad advisors, but rather as characters designed to test Job's faith and reveal the limitations of human wisdom. This interpretation provides a deeper understanding of the central question posed by the book of Job: is true righteousness based on material blessings, or something far more profound? By understanding their roles, we can grasp the significance of Job's response and the overall message of the text.

4. Job Study Guide: Session 12, Role of Wife and Friends

Book of Job: Roles of the Wife and Friends Study Guide

Quiz

Instructions: Answer each question in 2-3 sentences based on the provided material.

1. What are the three distinct focuses that the book of Job attributes to each of Job's friends?
2. According to the lecture, in what ways do the friends act as a group in the Book of Job?
3. How do the friends represent the Challenger's perspective?
4. What is the core assumption behind the friends' advice to Job?
5. Why does the lecture argue that the friends are not intended to serve as negative role models for comforting others?
6. What role does Job's wife play in the narrative, according to the lecture?
7. How does the wife's suggested solution align with the Challenger's viewpoint?
8. How do the friends and the wife work together in attempting to persuade Job?
9. What is the rhetorical purpose of the wife's brief appearance in the narrative?
10. How do the friends and the wife serve as "unwitting agents" for the Challenger?

Quiz Answer Key

1. The three friends each focus on different aspects: Eliphaz emphasizes the weight of personal experiences, Bildad focuses on the wisdom of the ages, and Zophar is concerned with finding understanding in a system of thinking. These distinct perspectives provide different angles to their advice to Job.
2. The friends collectively represent the sages of the ancient world, thought to possess the highest wisdom. They are presented as experts who ought to have an answer for Job's suffering, but they ultimately fail, becoming foils.
3. The friends represent the Challenger's philosophy by promoting the retribution principle and assuming that suffering is a result of some wrongdoing. They are concerned with Job's lost possessions, and if Job focused solely on getting his "stuff" back, that would prove that the Challenger is correct.

4. The friends operate on the assumption that people get what they deserve, adhering to a strict system of retribution. Therefore, they believe that Job's suffering indicates he must have committed some great evil, despite lacking concrete evidence.
5. The friends are not presented to offer bad examples of comforting others. Instead, their primary function is to fulfill important literary, theological, philosophical, and rhetorical roles in the book.
6. Job's wife, like the friends, serves as a role player who pushes Job toward the Challenger's agenda, urging him to curse God and die. She does not act as a life partner or offer emotional support, but instead functions as a catalyst for Job's response.
7. The wife's suggestion to "curse God and die" is meant to be a quick win for the Challenger because it assumes that Job would reject his righteousness in exchange for an end to his suffering.
8. Both the friends and the wife work together, but the friends want Job to get his "stuff" back, whereas the wife thinks it is no longer worth it. Both of these perspectives are what the Challenger is trying to prove that Job would do for his possessions or for an end to suffering.
9. The wife's brief appearance serves to avoid a quick win for the Challenger, to give Job another chance to reaffirm his faithfulness, to transition into the friends' dialogue, and to provide an opposite perspective to the friends, as she urges Job to give up while the friends are working on getting Job's stuff back.
10. The friends and the wife unintentionally serve the Challenger's agenda by pushing Job toward the idea that his righteousness depends on earthly benefits and that he should compromise his faith. This allows the Challenger's claims to be tested through their actions and assumptions.

Essay Questions

1. Analyze how the individual perspectives of Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar contribute to the overall portrayal of the flawed wisdom of the ancient world in the Book of Job. How does their differing approaches amplify the book's critiques?
2. Discuss the complex role of Job's wife in the narrative, considering that she is not presented as an individual but as a role player. How does her suggestion to "curse God and die" contribute to the philosophical and theological themes of the book?
3. Explore the narrative strategy of presenting the friends as representatives of the Challenger's perspective. What does this reveal about the nature of suffering, retribution, and the true essence of faith in the Book of Job?
4. The lecture argues that neither the friends nor Job's wife are intended to serve as role models of any sort. Instead, they are characters within a larger rhetorical, literary, and philosophical strategy. How does this interpretation change our understanding of their roles and their significance?
5. Examine the claim that the friends and the wife are "unwitting agents" of the Challenger. How does their actions inadvertently set the stage for the dialogues in the earthly realm that test the central questions about the true nature of Job's righteousness?

Glossary

- **Retribution Principle:** The belief that individuals receive consequences (good or bad) that directly correspond to their actions or moral behavior. This assumes that suffering indicates wrongdoing.
- **Literary Construct:** The idea that a character or situation in a story is created by the author to serve a particular purpose or theme and may not be intended as a direct reflection of reality.
- **Foil:** A character that contrasts with another character, highlighting certain qualities in the other character, typically the protagonist. In the Book of Job, the friends serve as foils to Job, emphasizing his faith.
- **Sages:** The wisest people within a culture. In the context of the Book of Job, the friends are meant to represent the highest wisdom that ancient society has to offer.
- **Challenger:** A character in the heavenly realm who raises doubts about the righteousness of Job, thereby initiating the trials he endures.
- **Unwitting Agents:** Characters who unintentionally serve the purposes or agenda of another character or entity, without being aware of the significance of their role.
- **Rhetorical Role:** The function a character or element plays in persuading the reader or audience and advancing the author's overall message or argument.
- **Systemization:** The attempt to understand the world by organizing it into systematic categories with clear principles and rules.

5. FAQs on Walton, Job, Session 12, Role of Wife and Friends, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions about the Roles of Job's Wife and Friends in the Book of Job

1. **What is the primary literary purpose of Job's three friends?** The three friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, are not meant to be seen as a single entity, but as individual characters with distinct approaches to understanding Job's suffering. Eliphaz focuses on personal experience, Bildad emphasizes the wisdom of the ages, and Zophar relies on a rigid system of thinking. Collectively, they represent the epitome of wisdom in the ancient world, but are ultimately revealed as flawed and misguided.
2. **How do Job's friends function as a group, and why are they considered "foils" in the narrative?** As a group, Job's friends represent the sages of the ancient world and its best attempts at explaining the world. However, the narrative uses them as foils, presenting their wisdom as shallow and inadequate, thereby highlighting the limitations of traditional thinking when confronted with profound suffering. They are supposed to be the best minds, yet their conclusions are rejected.
3. **In what way do the friends represent the Challenger's (Satan's) philosophical stance?** The friends embody the "retribution principle," the idea that people get what they deserve, which aligns with the Challenger's argument that Job only serves God because he is blessed materially. They assume Job's suffering is a direct result of hidden sins and urge him to repent to restore his blessings, which ultimately plays into the Challenger's idea that Job's righteousness is contingent on material prosperity.
4. **What is the primary misconception about the friends' role, and what is their true purpose in the story?** A common misconception is that the friends are present to teach readers how *not* to comfort those who are suffering. Instead, they are literary devices playing a specific role in the narrative, primarily as unwitting agents that push Job to believe his righteousness is ultimately about material gain, thereby indirectly furthering the Challenger's argument. Their actions are not intended as models of behavior, either good or bad.

5. **What is the literary purpose of Job's wife in the story?** Job's wife isn't presented as a deeply developed character, but primarily as a role player. She represents the "quick solution" from the Challenger's perspective: that Job should curse God and give up when faced with suffering. She is another element pushing Job to act as the Challenger expects. Her role is also a prelude to the friends' arrival, a contrast to their approach, and a further challenge to Job's faith.
6. **How do Job's wife and friends function in tandem to push Job toward the Challenger's point of view?** Both Job's wife and his friends, although using different specific arguments, push Job to focus on material well-being and whether or not that should determine his faithfulness to God. His wife suggests giving up due to his suffering, while his friends urge him to seek the restoration of his fortunes by admitting his sins. Both arguments are centered on the notion that blessings are the end goal, thus aligning with the Challenger's challenge that Job is only righteous because he is blessed.
7. **What is the significance of Job's response to his wife's suggestion, and what does this reveal about his character?** Job responds to his wife's urging to curse God by asking if we should only accept good from God and not trouble. This response shows Job's firm belief in God's sovereignty and that his relationship with God is not contingent on what he receives. He refuses to fall into the Challenger's trap and thus demonstrates his genuine righteousness.
8. **How do the roles of Job's wife and friends ultimately shape the narrative of the book, and what happens to the Challenger?** By serving as unwitting agents of the Challenger, Job's wife and friends set the stage for the book's central dialogues. Their actions challenge Job's righteousness, forcing him to grapple with his beliefs and suffering. The Challenger himself disappears from the narrative after setting these events in motion; his surrogates become the primary voices representing his challenges. The core of the book is Job's response to the pressure that the Challenger has engineered through others, not through direct attacks.