

Dr. John Walton, Job, Session 16

Dialogue Series 3 (Job 22-27)

Resources from NotebookLM

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

1. Abstract of Walton, Job, Session 16, Dialogue Series 3 (Job 22-27), Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. John Walton's lecture analyzes sections 22-27 of the Book of Job, focusing on **two particularly challenging passages**. He offers alternative translations based on **deeper grammatical analysis of the Hebrew text**, arguing against common interpretations. The lecture further **examines the rhetorical strategies** and overall argumentative flow of this dialogue cycle, highlighting the **central conflict** between Job's insistence on his innocence and his friends' accusations. Finally, it concludes by **summarizing the resolution** of the dialogue and the transition to the next section of the book.

2. 16 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Walton's, Job, Session 16 – 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
16.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 Session 16":

Briefing Document: John Walton on Job 22-27 (Cycle 3)

Introduction:

This document summarizes the key points from John Walton's lecture on Job 22-27, focusing on the third cycle of dialogues between Job and his friends. Walton emphasizes the challenging nature of interpreting the Hebrew text, particularly in Job, and highlights the rhetorical strategy and conclusions of this dialogue cycle. He also notes that this cycle is shorter, with Zophar not speaking at all and Bildad having a brief speech, and that it leads into the final discourse section of the book.

Key Themes and Ideas:

1. Difficulties in Translation:

- Walton emphasizes the challenges of translating the Book of Job, noting variations between translations and interpretations by commentators. He points out that some Hebrew words have meanings that are nuanced or unknown, making direct translation difficult. Syntactical problems also add to the translation challenges, especially within the poetic text.
- **Job 22:2-3:** Walton provides alternative translations based on his understanding of the syntax, suggesting that the passage is about a "wise mediator" serving on behalf of God, rather than directly about whether humans can benefit God. He interprets the verbs as "do any good" (for *sakan*), "justify yourself" (for *sadak*), and "give a full account of your ways" (for *tamam*), aligning with his view that these words are used in other parts of the book.
- **Walton's Translation:** "Can a wise mediator serving on behalf of God do any good for a human being? Can such a mediator bring any human benefit? Will God respond favorably when you justify yourself? Will there be a gain when you give a full account of your ways?"

- **Job 26:7:** Walton challenges the common interpretation of this verse as an anticipation of modern scientific understanding. He argues that "northern skies" (zaphon) refers to the cosmic mountain where the gods dwell, rather than just a point on the compass. "Empty space" (tohu) refers to a non-ordered, non-functional state, associated with cosmic waters, and not the modern concept of a vacuum. The earth being "suspended on" (talach) *belema* refers to being hung on a non-functional, non-ordered netherworld, which again is associated with cosmic waters, and is better understood as "suspended on" rather than "over". He claims that no one in the ancient world had the concept of the earth hanging in orbit.
- **Walton's Translation:** "heaven is stretched out over cosmic non-existence, the earth is suspended on the non-existent."

1. Rhetorical Strategy of Cycle 3:

- Despite the difficulties in interpreting certain verses, Walton asserts that the overall rhetorical strategy and sense of the cycle are understandable. The main focus of the dialogue is about whether Job will admit sin and whether he will acknowledge that he is being punished for his sins, even when he claims to be innocent.

1. Cycle 3 Summary:

- **Eliphaz:** Accuses Job of being wicked, claims his talk of a mediator is a smokescreen, and urges him to repent so that he can get his possessions and prestige back. Eliphaz has become more harsh with his accusations of Job.
- **Job's Response to Eliphaz:** Job maintains his innocence, focusing on the lack of justice in the world, noting how the wicked prosper while the innocent suffer. He acknowledges his position as terrifying. He does still cling to the idea of retribution.
- **Bildad:** Gives a short speech focusing on God's greatness and humanity's insignificance.
- **Job's Response to Bildad:** Rejects Bildad's advice, emphasizing that God's order in the cosmos is not reflected in his life. He also rejects Bildad's claim that people should be accepting of tradition. He claims he has become the victim of God and that his friends have become his enemies. Job declares that he will cling to his righteousness to the end.

1. Central Conflict and Resolution:

- The cycle revolves around the challenge that Job will curse God to his face, focusing on the idea of disinterested righteousness.
- The friends, and wife, represent a position that values "stuff," or benefits from righteousness, whereas Job insists on valuing righteousness for its own sake.
- Job's final words in chapter 27 (specifically verses 2-6) solidify his position, maintaining his integrity and innocence. He refuses to admit to sin he believes he hasn't committed, and won't deny his integrity to his dying breath.
- **Job's words:** "As surely as God lives, who has denied me justice, the Almighty, who has made my life bitter, as long as I have life within me, the breath of God in my nostrils, my lips will not say anything wicked, and my tongue will not utter lies...I will never admit you are in the right; till I die, I will not deny my integrity... I will maintain my innocence and never let go of it; my conscience will not reproach me as long as I live."

1. **Conclusion of Dialogue:**

- With Job's assertion of his innocence and rejection of his friend's advice, the dialogue cycle ends. The Challenger's case is proven wrong. Job has maintained his integrity.
- The friends are effectively out of the narrative until the epilogue.
- The book transitions to the discourse section, which takes up Job's accusation that it is not a good policy for righteous people to suffer.
- The transition is marked by the hymn to wisdom in chapter 28, which is the subject of the next session.

Key Quotes:

- **On translation challenges:** "When we open up an English translation, we often have this idea that somehow everything's been worked out and that the text is understood. But especially in Hebrew Bible, that's not necessarily the case."
- **On Job 22:2-3:** "Can a wise mediator serving on behalf of God do any good for a human being? Can such a mediator bring any human benefit? Will God respond favorably when you justify yourself? Will there be a gain when you give a full account of your ways?"
- **On Job 26:7:** "heaven is stretched out over cosmic non-existence, the earth is suspended on the non-existent."
- **On Job's final stance:** "I will never admit you are in the right; till I die, I will not deny my integrity."

Conclusion:

Walton's analysis of Job 22-27 highlights the complexities of biblical interpretation and the importance of understanding the rhetorical and structural elements of the text. The dialogue cycle concludes with Job maintaining his innocence and integrity, thereby defeating the challenge posed at the beginning of the book. This sets the stage for the discourse section and further questions about the nature of suffering and justice.

4. Job Study Guide: Session 16, Dialogue Series 3 (Job 22-27)

Study Guide: Job Session 16 - Dialogues Cycle 3

Quiz

Instructions: Answer the following questions in 2-3 sentences each, based on the provided source material.

1. What is notable about the structure of the third cycle of dialogues in the Book of Job?
2. According to John Walton, how do most translations of Job 22:2-3 miss the mark?
3. What is the significance of "Zaphon" in Job 26:7, and what does it represent beyond just a geographical direction?
4. Explain the meaning of the Hebrew words "tohu" and "belema" in the context of Job 26:7, and how they relate to the ancient understanding of existence.
5. What is Eliphaz's main argument in Cycle 3, and what is his advice to Job?
6. How does Job respond to Eliphaz's accusations, and what does Job emphasize about his own situation?
7. What is Bildad's contribution to the dialogue in Cycle 3, and how does Job react to it?
8. What is the key issue at the heart of the dialogue cycles that the friends press upon Job?
9. What is the significance of Job's final words in Job 27:2-6, and how do they relate to the challenge made by the Challenger at the beginning of the book?
10. What major shift occurs at the end of the dialogue section, and what is the focus of the next section of the Book of Job?

Quiz Answer Key

1. The third cycle of dialogues is much shorter, with Zophar not speaking at all and Bildad only having a very short speech. This reflects the arguments of the friends beginning to run out.
2. Most translations treat the word "man" as the subject in Job 22:2-3, while Walton argues it should be the object, with "wise mediator" as the subject, changing the verse's meaning. He also retranslates key verbs to emphasize this difference.

3. "Zaphon" refers not only to the geographic north but also to the cosmic mountain, which in Canaanite mythology was the dwelling place of the gods, making it a meeting point of heaven and earth and significant in biblical cosmology.
4. Both "tohu" and "belema" represent non-existence, but not in terms of matter, but in terms of lacking function and order. In the context of Job 26:7, they refer to the cosmic waters that were considered non-functional and non-ordered.
5. Eliphaz argues that Job's talk of a mediator is a smokescreen. He believes God knows Job's wicked deeds and that he is getting what he deserves. He advises Job to stop arguing and start listening.
6. Job responds by stating he is innocent and that his situation is terrifying, given that God does not seem to be doing anything to correct injustice in the world. He acknowledges the retribution principle but that his suffering does not seem to align with it.
7. Bildad contributes by reiterating traditional wisdom about God's greatness and the insignificance of humans, an argument Job finds unpersuasive. Job retorts that God has brought disorder into his life despite the cosmic order.
8. The key issue the friends try to press upon Job is whether or not Job will admit to sin. They think if he will admit sin, he will be restored to his former prosperity. The friends believe this will prove that Job does not have disinterested righteousness.
9. Job's final words in Job 27:2-6 are a declaration of his innocence, vowing not to admit to sins he doesn't believe he committed, and that he will maintain his integrity until the end. This directly refutes the Challenger's claim that Job would curse God to his face.
10. The dialogue section ends with the Challenger's case being proven wrong. Job has maintained his innocence. The next section will transition to Job's accusation that it is a bad policy for the righteous to suffer.

Essay Questions

Instructions: Address the following questions in well-organized essays, drawing upon the source material. Do not provide answers to these questions.

1. Analyze the different interpretations of Job 22:2-3, contrasting Walton's translation with other perspectives. What are the implications of these various

interpretations for our understanding of the relationship between humans and God in the Book of Job?

2. Discuss the significance of Job 26:7 in the context of ancient Near Eastern cosmology. How does Walton's interpretation challenge traditional understandings of this verse, and what does it reveal about the worldview of the Book of Job?
3. Explore the rhetorical strategies used by Eliphaz and Bildad in Cycle 3. How do their arguments shift from previous cycles, and what are the major differences in their perspectives? How does each character's strategy further their argument?
4. Examine the theme of integrity in the Book of Job, particularly as it relates to the Challenger's accusation and Job's final words in the dialogue section. How does the concept of "disinterested righteousness" play out in Job's struggle and how does this inform the rest of the Book of Job?
5. Evaluate the ending of the dialogue section and the transition to the discourse section of the Book of Job. What are the main conflicts resolved and unresolved at this juncture, and how do they set the stage for the next phase of the narrative?

Glossary of Key Terms

Ancient Near East: A historical and geographical region that encompasses the Middle East and parts of North Africa and Southeast Europe during antiquity. The region is a key context for understanding the Hebrew Bible.

Belema: A Hebrew term used in Job 26:7; traditionally translated as "nothing," but understood to mean non-existence in terms of lacking function and order, referring to the non-functional cosmic waters.

Cosmic Mountain: A mythological mountain often regarded as the meeting point between heaven and earth, and the dwelling place of the gods. This is an important element in ancient Near Eastern cosmology.

Disinterested Righteousness: The idea that righteousness should be pursued for its own sake, not for the benefits it might bring, as challenged in the Book of Job.

Eretz: A Hebrew word that is generally translated as "earth," but which can refer to the netherworld or the realm below in Job 26:7.

Goel: Hebrew term for "redeemer," "advocate," or "mediator."

Hiphil Form: A verb form in Hebrew that adds a causative element, where the subject causes the action of the verb to occur.

Maskil: A Hebrew word that is often translated as "wise" or "skillful," but according to Walton, should be understood as "wise mediator" in Job 22:2.

Qal Form: A basic or simple verb form in Hebrew.

Retribution Principle: The idea that the righteous are rewarded and the wicked are punished. This concept is frequently discussed and challenged in the Book of Job.

Tohu: A Hebrew word meaning "formless" or "void," used in Genesis 1:2 and Job 26:7, often referring to the non-ordered, non-functional cosmic waters.

Zaphon: A Hebrew word meaning "north," but also referring to Mount Zaphon, the sacred mountain in Canaanite mythology where the gods dwelt.

5. FAQs on Walton, Job, Session 16, Dialogue Series 3 (Job 22-27), Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

FAQ on Job Chapters 22-27 Based on John Walton's Analysis

1. **Why is Cycle 3 of the dialogues in Job so brief, and what happens with the characters?** Cycle 3 is brief because the arguments of Job's friends are running out. Zophar does not speak at all, and Bildad only has a very short speech. Eliphaz remains the main speaker for the friends. This signifies a decline in their ability to counter Job's arguments.
2. **How does Walton interpret the difficult verses in Job 22:2-3, and how does it differ from other translations?** Walton interprets these verses as not about whether humans can benefit God, but rather as questioning whether a "wise mediator" can do any good for a human being serving on behalf of God. He translates it as, "Can a wise mediator serving on behalf of God do any good for a human being? Can such a mediator bring any human benefit? Will God respond favorably when you justify yourself? Will there be a gain when you give a full account of your ways?" This differs from other translations that focus on whether humans can benefit God or whether their righteousness is an asset to God. Walton bases his interpretation on similar syntax found in other verses in Job and the usage of specific words. He also interprets the verbs as "justify yourself" based on Job's previous accusations of self justification.
3. **What is the significance of Job 26:7, particularly the phrases "northern skies" and "suspends the earth over nothing" according to Walton?** Walton argues that Job 26:7 should not be interpreted as a scientific statement about the earth hanging in space. He interprets "northern skies" (zaphon) not as a directional reference but as a reference to the cosmic mountain, the dwelling place of the gods. The phrase "empty space" (tohu) is interpreted as a reference to the non-ordered cosmic waters. Furthermore, "suspends the earth over nothing" (belema) should be read as "suspended on" the non-existent (the cosmic waters), which is the nether world, and not as matterless space. Therefore, the verse is a reference to the cosmological structure of waters above and waters below, not a description of earth in orbit.

4. **How does Eliphaz's argument in Cycle 3 shift, and what does he accuse Job of?** In Cycle 3, Eliphaz's arguments become harsher. He moves past gentle persuasion and accuses Job of having committed secret wicked deeds and injustices. He believes Job's talk of a mediator is a smokescreen and that he is receiving what he deserves. He also focuses on Job regaining his material possessions, demonstrating a very unsympathetic view of Job's situation.
5. **How does Job respond to Eliphaz's accusations in Cycle 3?** Job dismisses Eliphaz's accusations and expresses his longing to find God and understand why he is suffering despite being innocent. He observes that the world seems unjust, with oppressors running unchecked while the poor and innocent suffer. However, he still holds on to the idea that wickedness will be punished eventually.
6. **What is Bildad's argument in Cycle 3, and how does Job respond to it?** Bildad briefly argues that God is unimaginably great and humans are inherently flawed, and so essentially irrelevant. Job finds this argument unpersuasive and responds by pointing out that while God has established order in the cosmos, his own life is in total chaos. Job asserts that he is a victim of God's actions. He is also resolute that he will not follow the advice of the friends and will maintain his innocence to the very end.
7. **What is the significance of Job's final words in chapter 27 and how does it relate to the initial challenge in the book?** Job's final words in chapter 27 are his declaration of innocence. He emphatically states that he has not sinned and will not lie by agreeing with his friends that he deserves his suffering. He maintains that his integrity rests in maintaining his innocence, not in regaining his wealth, directly addressing the initial challenge that Job would curse God to his face. His continued righteousness proves that Job's integrity is not based on reward.
8. **What conclusions can be drawn about the dialogue section of Job at the end of chapter 27, and what does this signify for the rest of the book?** The dialogue section concludes with Job maintaining his innocence and integrity despite his suffering, proving the Challenger wrong. He rejects his friends' advice to repent and seek restoration, marking a definitive parting of ways. The dialogue section is over, and the stage is set for the discourse section, where the question of why righteous people suffer is explored further. This marks a transition from the friends' accusations against Job to Job's own accusations against God.