

## **Dr. John Walton, Job, Session 18**

### **Job's Discourse (Job 29-31)**

### **Resources from NotebookLM**

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

#### **1. Abstract of Walton, Job, Session 18, Conclusion of Dialogue Series and Wisdom Interlude (Job 28), Biblicalelearning.org, BeL**

This lecture by Dr. John Walton analyzes Job's three speeches (chapters 29-31) within the larger context of the Book of Job. **Job's speeches** contrast with the earlier dialogues, focusing on the incoherence of his suffering and his attempt to force God's hand through an oath of innocence to gain vindication. **Walton highlights** how Job's strategy prioritizes his righteousness over God's reputation, potentially portraying God as unjust. **The lecture** concludes by emphasizing the high stakes of Job's challenge to God's actions and policies. **The overall analysis** explores the theological implications of Job's perspective and his confrontation with God's silence.

**2. 20 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Walton's, Job, Session 18 – 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  
n18.mp3**

### 3. Briefing Document

Okay, here's a detailed briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from the provided excerpt of John Walton's lecture on Job 29-31:

#### **Briefing Document: John Walton on Job's Discourse (Job 29-31)**

**Source:** Excerpts from "Walton\_Job\_Session18.pdf"

**Date:** October 26, 2023

#### **Introduction:**

This document summarizes Dr. John Walton's analysis of Job's discourse in chapters 29-31 of the Book of Job, focusing on the shift in Job's perspective and strategy compared to the preceding dialogues with his friends. Walton highlights Job's attempt to establish coherence and vindicate himself in the face of divine silence, and the potential ramifications for God's reputation.

#### **Main Themes and Key Ideas:**

##### **1. Structure of the Discourse Section:**

- The discourse section of Job is composed of three major speeches: Job's (3 speeches), Elihu's (4 speeches), and Yahweh's (2 speeches). This interesting structure, with Elihu having more speeches than both Job and God, is a rhetorical technique.
- Walton is focused on Job's three speeches in this session.

##### **1. Job's Three Speeches (Job 29-31):**

- **Chapter 29: Coherence of the Past:** Job reminisces about his past, when he was prosperous and respected, and the "retribution principle was working." Everything was right, and he was a "happy camper, fearing God."
- **Chapter 30: Incoherence of the Present:** Job describes his current state of ostracization, rejection, and suffering. He is not just suffering quietly; people around him are treating him terribly.
- **Chapter 31: Search for Coherence via Oath of Innocence:** Job does not try to revise his expectations of justice. Instead, he attempts to force God's hand by swearing an oath of innocence. He's not doing this to regain his prosperity, but rather, to receive vindication.

## 1. Contrast with the Dialogues:

- **The Friends' Approach:** The friends sought to help Job find coherence by having him recognize his sin, repent, and appease God, thereby regaining his blessings. Their view centered on a cosmos founded on justice, where appeasement is the key to equilibrium. They believed Job's righteousness was motivated by the benefits he received from it.
- **Job's New Approach:** Job rejects the friends' approach. He is not interested in regaining prosperity through self-interested righteousness. Instead, he seeks coherence based on his own innocence, raising the question of why righteous people suffer despite God's supposed justice.
- Walton states, "In the dialogue section, Job demonstrated that his righteousness was more important to him than the benefits of prosperity."

## 1. Job's Focus on His Own Righteousness Over God's Reputation:

- Job is more concerned with his own righteousness and vindication than with God's reputation. Walton says, "In this discourse of Job, it becomes clear that his righteousness is more important to him than God's reputation."
- By building his "fort" on his righteousness, Job challenges God's actions and policies. He seeks to restore his status in the community as a righteous person (not based on stuff or prosperity, but status based on righteousness).

## 1. The Oath of Innocence (Job 31):

- Job lists a series of offenses he has not committed, essentially swearing his innocence. He doesn't regain prosperity from this; he hopes his reputation will be vindicated and his claim to righteousness will be upheld.
- The oath is a strategic move to force God to act. By swearing to his innocence, Job is throwing the burden of proof onto God.
- Walton says, "By swearing that, he is throwing the ball into God's court because by swearing to it, if God's going to uphold his oath, God has to act against him."
- If God does not punish him, Job will be exonerated through divine silence. He's trying to "manipulate God... to work for his benefit instead of working against him."

### 1. **God as a "Chaos Creature":**

- If Job wins through this strategy, God is reduced to a powerful being that is not characterized by either wisdom or justice. Job turns God into a "chaos creature."
- Walton highlights the parallel to Job's earlier lament, where he asks why God treats him like a chaos creature. Job is now treating God as such.

### 1. **Consequences for God's Reputation:**

- Job's strategy puts God's reputation at stake. It shifts the focus away from Job's motives to God's own.
- Walton states, "Now it's not Job's reputation. It's not Job's motivation. It's God's reputation and God's motivation."
- This challenge poses a far more serious threat to God than what Job was accused of by his friends.

### 1. **Transition to Elihu's Discourse:**

- Walton concludes by noting that before they examine God's response, they must consider the discourse of Elihu.

### **Key Quotes:**

- "In this discourse of Job, it becomes clear that his righteousness is more important to him than God's reputation."
- "By swearing that, he is throwing the ball into God's court because by swearing to it, if God's going to uphold his oath, God has to act against him."
- "So again, Job would not regain any of his former prosperity, but if he can claim he has been vindicated by the fact that God has not struck him dead and thereby exonerated, he can hope to reclaim his standing and status in the community."
- "If Job wins in this confrontation with God, God is reduced to a powerful being characterized by neither wisdom nor justice, in effect, a chaos creature."

**Conclusion:**

Job's discourse in chapters 29-31 marks a significant shift from the dialogues. He abandons the friends' attempts to restore his prosperity through appeasement and instead, seeks to assert his innocence by manipulating divine silence. This strategy not only places Job's righteousness above God's reputation but also raises serious questions about the nature and justice of God, potentially casting him as a "chaos creature". This segment sets the stage for the subsequent discourses by Elihu and God, which will address these profound challenges.

## 4. Job Study Guide: Session 18, Job's Discourse (Job 29-31)

### Job's Discourse (Chapters 29-31) Study Guide

#### Quiz

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

1. How does Job describe his past in chapter 29?
2. What is the main focus of Job's speech in chapter 30?
3. In chapter 31, what strategy does Job use to seek coherence?
4. How does Job's approach to finding coherence in his discourses differ from the approach taken by his friends in the dialogues?
5. According to Walton, what is the underlying issue in Job's discourses?
6. What is the significance of Job's oath of innocence in chapter 31?
7. How does Job try to manipulate God's silence to his advantage?
8. If Job's strategy is successful, what does it imply about God?
9. According to Walton, how is God's reputation at stake in Job's oath of innocence?
10. How does Job's view of God change from the beginning of the book to the end of his discourse?

#### Answer Key

1. In chapter 29, Job describes his past as a time when everything was comfortable and right, and the retribution principle was working, and he was happy, fearing God. He reminisces about a time when he was prosperous and respected.
2. In chapter 30, Job's speech focuses on the incoherence of the present, emphasizing how he is now despised and ostracized, revealing a drastic change from his previous status.
3. In chapter 31, Job seeks coherence by making an oath of innocence, trying to force God's hand. He's not looking to regain prosperity but seeking vindication.
4. The friends offer Job a solution that involves appeasement and self-interested righteousness, while Job seeks his path to coherence by demonstrating his disinterested righteousness and challenging God's policies.

5. The underlying issue in Job's discourses shifts from whether Job's righteousness was disinterested (as in the dialogues) to why God's policies allow righteous people to suffer.
6. Job's oath of innocence is significant because he is not trying to regain prosperity. It is a way of attempting to force God into action by swearing he is not guilty of offenses.
7. Job attempts to manipulate God's silence by challenging God to strike him dead if his oath is untrue. By not striking him dead, Job hopes to be vindicated.
8. If Job's strategy succeeds, God is reduced to a powerful being without justice or wisdom, a chaos creature.
9. God's reputation is at stake because Job's oath raises the question of whether God will uphold his oath and is truly just, challenging the very nature of God's character and actions.
10. Job goes from a sufferer of inexplicable circumstances, to one who views God as a chaos creature with little regard for justice. In the beginning he laments, and by the end, he challenges.

### **Essay Questions**

**Instructions:** Develop an essay response to each question by including information and evidence from the source.

1. Analyze the rhetorical strategies employed by Job in chapters 29-31, and explain how they contribute to the overall message of the Book of Job.
2. Compare and contrast the concept of coherence in the dialogue section of Job and Job's discourses. What does this reveal about his relationship with God?
3. Explain how Job's oath of innocence in chapter 31 challenges the traditional understanding of the retribution principle.
4. Discuss the significance of God's silence in the Book of Job, particularly in the context of Job's discourses. How does Job attempt to utilize this silence to his advantage?
5. Evaluate the implications of Job's challenge to God's policies and reputation, and explore the extent to which Job's actions are justifiable within the context of the book.

## Glossary of Key Terms

**Coherence:** In this context, coherence refers to a state of order, justice, and understanding in the world. Both Job and his friends are trying to understand why this is not currently the case.

**Retribution Principle:** The belief that good deeds lead to blessings, while bad deeds lead to punishment. This idea is challenged by Job's suffering and by God's silence.

**Disinterested Righteousness:** Righteousness that is not motivated by personal gain or benefit. Job maintains this characteristic throughout the book, despite his suffering.

**Appeasement:** The act of trying to satisfy or pacify a deity or higher power to regain their favor. This is the strategy that the friends advocate for Job.

**Oath of Innocence:** A formal declaration or vow by Job in chapter 31, where he swears he has not committed certain offenses, challenging God to respond. Job hopes this will vindicate him if God does not strike him dead.

**Vindication:** The act of clearing someone of blame or suspicion; the process of being proven righteous, which is the goal for Job.

**Chaos Creature:** In the text, this refers to the image Job gives to God if his strategy works, a being that has great power without wisdom or justice.

**Great Symbiosis:** The concept that relationships exist between God and humankind, and that people must meet the needs of God, in order for God to meet the needs of humankind.

**Rhetorical Strategy:** The use of language and argumentation in order to effectively communicate a specific point, such as the way in which Job lays out his arguments in chapters 29-31.

**Plaintiff:** In this context, Job sees himself as the plaintiff in a court case and is seeking to bring God to court to have his case heard.



## 5. FAQs on Walton, Job, Session 18, Job's Discourse (Job 29-31), [Biblicalelearning.org](http://Biblicalelearning.org) (BeL)

### FAQ on Job's Discourse (Job 29-31)

1. **How does Job's perspective shift across chapters 29, 30, and 31?** In chapter 29, Job reflects on his past when he was prosperous, respected, and believed in the just world where the righteous prosper. Chapter 30 describes the incoherence of his present, where he is despised, ostracized, and suffering despite his righteousness. Finally, in chapter 31, Job attempts to regain coherence, not through revising his understanding of justice, but by issuing an oath of innocence, hoping to force God's hand to vindicate him.
2. **What was the primary difference between the dialogues with Job's friends and Job's own discourse in Job 29-31?** In the dialogues, the friends tried to offer a path to regain prosperity through appeasement of God, which implied Job's righteousness was motivated by self-interest. In his discourse, Job seeks a path to coherence and vindication that is independent of appeasement and prosperity, thereby challenging God's policies and questioning why the righteous suffer. He is concerned with vindication of his righteousness rather than material benefit.
3. **What is the significance of Job's oath of innocence in Chapter 31?** Job's oath of innocence is his attempt to force God into action. By listing offenses he has not committed, Job effectively dares God to punish him if he is lying. If God remains silent, Job believes it will serve as vindication and validate his claim to righteousness. It is a deliberate strategy to use God's silence to work in his favor.
4. **How does Job's strategy in his discourse impact his pursuit of righteousness?** Job's strategy demonstrates that his righteousness is more important to him than God's reputation. He seeks coherence and vindication of his integrity based on his own actions rather than submitting to God's perceived lack of justice. This represents disinterested righteousness as it is not tied to material gain.
5. **What is the key difference between Job's focus and that of his friends in relation to righteousness?** Job's friends focused on righteousness as a means to an end, a pathway to gain God's favor and material blessing, whereas Job is concerned with righteousness itself, separate from any material benefit or divine reward. The friends equated righteousness with prosperity, but Job's righteousness was disinterested, meaning it was about his integrity, not his status or possessions.

6. **Why is Job frustrated with God's silence?** Throughout the dialogues, Job repeatedly calls for God to engage in conversation, viewing himself as a plaintiff seeking justice. God's silence reinforces the assumption that Job is out of favor and being punished. Thus, Job seeks to reverse the impact of this silence through his oath of innocence.
7. **In Job's strategy, what happens to God if Job succeeds?** If Job's oath of innocence leads to his vindication, and if God remains silent and does not punish him, it reduces God to a powerful but neither wise nor just figure, essentially a chaos creature. This scenario is worse than the one proposed by Job's friends because it implies not only that God is transactional, but that he is also arbitrary and incoherent.
8. **How does Job's discourse raise the stakes for God's reputation?** Job's discourse shifts the focus from Job's righteousness and motivation to God's reputation and policies. By challenging God with his oath, Job risks making God appear unjust and incoherent if he fails to respond to Job's plea, turning the challenge into a question of God's integrity and not just Job's suffering.