

Dr. John Walton, Job, Session 23

Epilogue (Job 42)

Resources from NotebookLM

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

1. Abstract of Walton, Job, Session 23, Epilogue (Job 42), Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. John Walton's lecture analyzes the epilogue of the Book of Job (Job 42). **He argues** that the epilogue's restoration of Job's prosperity is not a validation of the retribution principle, but rather a demonstration of God's unchanging policies and a gift, not a reward. **Walton emphasizes** that the book's true message lies in understanding God's wisdom, not expecting explanations for suffering. **The focus** is on correcting misconceptions about God's actions and the nature of the cosmos, leading to wiser thinking. **Ultimately**, the epilogue concludes the narrative, not the thematic message of the book.

**2. 11 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of
Dr. Walton's, Job, Session 23 – 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
23.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 42:

Briefing Document: John Walton on Job 42 (Epilogue)

Source: Excerpts from "Walton_Job_Session23.pdf"

Introduction:

This document summarizes John Walton's interpretation of Job 42, the epilogue of the Book of Job. Walton argues the epilogue is not the concluding message of the book, but rather a tying up of loose ends, particularly regarding the reprimand of Job's friends and the restoration of Job's prosperity. He emphasizes that the epilogue should not be interpreted as a reinstatement of the retribution principle, but as a demonstration of God's continued freedom and wisdom, and a way to understand God's policies more accurately.

Key Themes and Ideas:

1. Reprimand and Reconciliation of Job's Friends:

- God is angry with Job's three friends (Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar), but not Elihu, for not speaking "the truth" to God. Elihu is not reprimanded because he spoke correctly about God.
- Walton highlights a crucial translation issue: the phrase "the truth *about* me" is inaccurate. The correct translation, based on the Hebrew verb and preposition combination, is "the truth *to* me." This points to the idea that the friends' problem wasn't that they spoke inaccurately *about* God, but that they failed to speak a penitent response *to* God.
- God instructs the friends to offer a burnt offering, and Job will pray for them. God accepts Job's prayer, indicating that the right relationship with God is restored through Job's intercession.
- **Quote:** "I am angry with you and your two friends because you have not spoken the truth about me, as my servant Job has. So now take seven bulls and seven rams and go to my servant Job and sacrifice a burnt offering for yourselves. My servant Job will pray for you, and I will accept his prayer and not deal with you according to your folly. You have not spoken the truth about me as my servant Job has."

1. Divine Approval of Job's Final Statements (Job 42:1-6):

- Walton stresses that God's approval is specifically for what Job has spoken *to God* in Job 42:1-6, not everything Job said throughout the dialogues of the book. Job was wrong about many things he said previously.
- The friends are reprimanded for their lack of a similar penitent response. God's acceptance is focused on Job's changed perspective.
- **Quote:** "It's only what Job has just spoken to Yahweh that has been given approval, and that's in contrast to the things he spoke throughout the book. So, God has not declared that everything Job said is right."

1. The Epilogue's Rhetorical Strategy: Not Reinstating Retribution:

- Walton argues that the epilogue, specifically the restoration of Job's prosperity, is often misconstrued as a reaffirmation of the retribution principle (that the righteous are rewarded and the wicked punished). He points out that restoring prosperity doesn't erase suffering.
- Walton suggests that the Book of Job is a "thought experiment", not a historical account and focuses on God's policies.
- The challenges made by both the Challenger (that righteous people should prosper) and Job (that righteous people should *not* suffer) are shown to be untenable. God is not bound to such principles. By restoring Job's prosperity, God shows that his policies remain unchanged and unchallenged.
- **Quote:** "By restoring Job's prosperity in the epilogue, God makes a clear statement that he will continue to act as he did before, and the policy's unchanged."

1. Prosperity as a Gift, Not a Reward:

- The restoration of Job's prosperity should not be viewed as a reward Job has earned or that God is obligated to give. It is a *gift* from God, based on God's pleasure, not some cosmic transaction.
- This reframes our understanding of prosperity in relation to suffering. The epilogue doesn't suggest that suffering will always be met with compensation in the future.
- **Quote:** "Whatever prosperity he experiences is a gift from God, plain and simple."

1. Learning from Job's Experience vs. Learning About God:

- The purpose of the book is not to emulate Job's actions or expect similar outcomes. We are not asked to "be like Job." Rather, the book is designed to guide us in thinking more accurately about God. Job's suffering is not a model for our experience, but an opportunity for a better understanding of God.
- **Quote:** "Instead, the book prompts us to learn how to think about God more accurately, just as Job learns alongside us, how to think about God more accurately."

1. Rejection of the "Triangle" of Retribution, Righteousness, and Justice:

- The retribution principle (righteousness leads to reward/wickedness to punishment), Job's righteousness, and God's justice were seen as interconnected during Job's dialogues. Walton refers to this as a "triangle," where each side depends upon the other.
- Walton argues that God does not fit into this "triangle." It is a human construct that attempts to understand the cosmos. He says God "crumbles it up and throws it away."
- The foundation for understanding God's actions isn't justice, but *wisdom*. Actions or events that appear to follow the retribution principle are simply the "ripple effects" of God's character as He operates with wisdom, bringing both blessing and judgment.
- **Quote:** "God doesn't fit on the triangle. The triangle is rejected. We don't have a triangle of claims. The basis is not justice. The basis is wisdom."

1. The Purpose of the Book is Not to Explain Suffering:

- The book of Job does not offer an explanation for why righteous people suffer. Instead, it offers a framework for *right thinking about God* amidst pervasive suffering.
- Walton emphasizes that the epilogue is the perfect conclusion because it addresses the challenges to God's policies, dispels misconceptions about the cosmos, and guides us to gain wisdom. It helps us to avoid foolish thinking that leads to rejecting God.
- **Quote:** "The only explanation the book offers is concerning right thinking about God and his policies in a world where suffering is pervasive and inevitable."

Conclusion:

Walton's analysis of the epilogue of Job 42 stresses that it's not about restoring a flawed system of divine retribution, but about understanding God's freedom and wisdom. The restoration of Job's prosperity is not to be taken as an equation, rather as God's prerogative. The book ultimately shifts the focus from human suffering and justice to God's character and policies. This helps to provide a framework for faithful thinking about God in a world where suffering is inevitable.

4. Job Study Guide: Session 23, Epilogue (Job 42)

Job: Session 23 Study Guide

Quiz

Instructions: Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. According to Walton, why is the epilogue often a source of confusion for readers?
2. Why does God reprimand Job's three friends, but not Elihu?
3. How does the translation of *nekonah* affect our understanding of the epilogue?
4. What is the significance of God's approval of Job's words in the epilogue?
5. How does the restoration of Job's prosperity relate to the retribution principle?
6. In Walton's view, what is the purpose of restoring Job's prosperity?
7. What is the primary goal of the Book of Job, according to Walton?
8. What is the significance of the "triangle" in the Book of Job, and what is God's relationship to it?
9. According to Walton, what should be our takeaway from the Book of Job?
10. How does the epilogue function as a conclusion to the book, but not the message of the book?

Answer Key

1. The epilogue is often a source of confusion because it seems to be the concluding message, but it's merely tying up loose ends and not the core of the book's message. The restoration of Job's prosperity appears to reinstate the retribution principle, which is not the point of the book.
2. God reprimands Job's three friends because they did not speak correctly to God, while Elihu, though not completely correct, at least spoke about God in a way that was more accurate. Therefore, Elihu is not included in the reprimand.
3. The translation of *nekonah* as "the truth *about* me" is misleading. The correct translation is "to speak to someone who is present," which changes the understanding of God's criticism of Job's friends as being about their lack of a penitent response to God.

4. God's approval of Job's words in the epilogue is significant because it is specifically directed toward the response Job just gave to God in chapter 42, verses 1-6, and not everything he said throughout the rest of the book. This shows that Job's penitent speech was an approved response, but not his previous complaints.
5. The restoration of Job's prosperity is not meant as a reinstallation of the retribution principle, because the point of the book is that God's actions are not founded on the retribution principle. Instead, Job now sees prosperity as a gift from God, not something earned or owed.
6. The purpose of restoring Job's prosperity is not for Job's benefit, but to reinstate God's challenged policies that were presented earlier in the book. The prosperity reaffirms that God acts as he always did and is not bound by the retribution principle.
7. The primary goal of the Book of Job is to teach us how to think more accurately about God and his policies, particularly regarding the nature of suffering. It does not focus on Job's specific experiences, but on the reader's understanding of God.
8. The "triangle" represents a human attempt to understand the ordering of the cosmos, based on the retribution principle, with God's justice and human righteousness. God rejects this triangle and the principle of retribution, with a new basis of wisdom.
9. We should learn to view prosperity as a gift from God rather than as a reward, recognizing that the world doesn't operate on the principle of retribution. Additionally, we should focus on understanding God's character and policies, not applying Job's specific experiences to our own.
10. The epilogue serves as a conclusion by resolving specific loose ends in the plot and the question of God's challenged policies, but it does not embody the book's central message. The main message was found in God's speeches, rather than Job's.

Essay Questions

Instructions: Consider these questions for deeper analysis of the source material.

1. Analyze how the interpretation of *nekonah* ("truth") impacts the overall message of the epilogue and the reader's understanding of Job's relationship with God.
2. Discuss the significance of Walton's assertion that the Book of Job is a "thought experiment," and how it shapes the way the epilogue is meant to be understood.
3. Explore the implications of the rejection of the "triangle" of justice, righteousness, and God's justice in favor of a foundation based on wisdom, in the Book of Job and for the reader.
4. Examine how Walton's interpretation of the Book of Job challenges common assumptions about the nature of suffering and the relationship between righteousness and prosperity.
5. Compare and contrast the roles of Job's friends and Elihu in the dialogues and how they are addressed in the epilogue, according to Walton's interpretation.

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Epilogue:** A concluding section at the end of a literary work. In the Book of Job, the epilogue is a prose section that ties up loose ends.
- **Nekonah:** A Hebrew word meaning "logical, sensible, verifiable," used to describe "truth" in the Old Testament. The combination of the verb with the preposition suggests speaking *to* someone rather than *about* someone.
- **Retribution Principle:** The belief that righteous actions are rewarded with prosperity, and wicked actions are punished with suffering. The Book of Job challenges this idea.
- **Thought Experiment:** A literary device that frames a story as a mental exercise, not necessarily a literal account of events. Walton suggests the Book of Job is a thought experiment about God's policies and human assumptions about the way the world is ordered.
- **Theodicy:** The attempt to explain why a good and all-powerful God would allow suffering and evil in the world. Walton argues that the Book of Job is not about theodicy, per se, but about correct thinking concerning God.
- **Wisdom:** In the context of Job, wisdom is the understanding of God's character and policies, beyond human attempts to fit his actions into simplistic systems like the retribution principle.
- **Penitent:** The feeling of regret or remorse after a wrongdoing, with a commitment to change, as Job shows in his last speech.
- **Dialogues:** The conversation between Job and his friends in the main, poetic section of the Book of Job.
- **The Challenger:** The figure in the first section of the Book of Job that challenges the idea that righteous people are rewarded with prosperity, which is followed by Job's challenge to God's policy that righteous people suffer.

5. FAQs on Walton, Job, Session 23, Epilogue (Job 42), Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

FAQ on the Book of Job's Epilogue

1. **Why are Job's friends reprimanded in the epilogue, but Elihu is not?** Job's three friends are reprimanded because they did not speak truthfully *to* God, which in this context means they did not offer a penitent response as Job did at the end of the dialogue. They remained silent instead of responding to God in humility. Elihu, on the other hand, is not reprimanded because he did speak rightly *to* God in his previous speeches within the book, though he did not fully grasp God's policies either. The reprimand specifically targets the lack of a humble response to God, which Job provided.
2. **What does it mean that Job spoke "truth to" God, not "truth about" God?** This is a crucial point based on the Hebrew language. The text does not use the preposition that typically means "about." The phrase "truth to me" means that Job's final response directly addresses God in a way that is considered truthful and right in its humility and penitence. This phrase refers to Job's specific and final submission before God, rather than a broader statement of truth about God's character.
3. **Does God's approval of Job's final speech mean that everything Job said throughout the book was correct?** No, God's approval is specifically tied to Job's response in the epilogue (Job 42:1-6). God explicitly states that Job's friends didn't speak rightly to God as Job has done. This indicates that not all of Job's statements and arguments throughout the dialogues were correct, and only his final penitent response to God is affirmed as "truthful".
4. **Why does God restore Job's prosperity in the epilogue? Does this mean the retribution principle is correct?** The restoration of Job's prosperity is not meant to reinstate the retribution principle, which suggests that good people are always rewarded and bad people punished. The primary purpose of restoring Job's wealth is to reaffirm God's challenged policies. It demonstrates that God's favor is not mechanical or earned, but rather a gift. This challenges the concept that God is obligated to reward righteousness, and instead highlights his wisdom, power, and freedom in distributing blessings. The restoration is not primarily for Job's benefit but for reaffirming that God is not bound by a strict system of retribution and to show the world a different way to think about blessings.

5. **If the retribution principle is not how God operates, how should we understand prosperity and suffering?** Prosperity should be viewed as a gift from God, not as a deserved reward. Similarly, suffering is not necessarily a consequence of personal sin and does not require an explanation related to theodicy. The book of Job demonstrates that the relationship between righteousness and prosperity is not a strict, mechanistic one. God is not bound by human attempts to understand the world or divine justice, instead, His actions are based in His own wisdom.
6. **What is the significance of the "triangle" mentioned, and why does God reject it?** The "triangle" represents human attempts to understand the cosmos and God's actions using simple equations, particularly the concept that justice is the foundation of the world through the retribution principle. It positions Job's righteousness, God's justice, and the principle of retribution as interlocking, necessary components of a working world. God rejects this triangle because his actions are not limited to or bound by the framework of human justice as represented by the retribution principle. He operates beyond these frameworks, based on his own wisdom and freedom. This rejection emphasizes the need to go beyond simple human categories when trying to understand God and his policies.
7. **What is the primary lesson of the Book of Job, and what is it *not* about?** The primary lesson of the Book of Job is not about learning to be like Job, or about modeling one's responses after his behavior. Neither is it about finding an answer to the problem of suffering or trying to apply the retribution principle to daily life. Instead, the Book of Job invites readers to think more accurately about God, his policies, and the nature of the world. It prompts a reassessment of our pre-conceived ideas about how the cosmos operates. The ultimate point is to come to a better understanding of God and not the suffering Job experienced.
8. **How does the epilogue relate to the message of the Book of Job?** The epilogue is the conclusion of the book, but it does *not* contain the message of the book. Instead, the message comes out of God's speeches in the main portion of the book. The epilogue is a way of tying up loose ends, and addressing the false conclusions that could be drawn from the rest of the book. The epilogue doesn't offer an explanation or justification for suffering; it instead serves as a narrative resolution. It showcases God's freedom to bless and act according to his wisdom without being bound by the retribution principle or other human-made systems, while reestablishing his policy that is not based on justice as the world sees it.