

Dr. John Walton, Job, Session 26

God in the Book of Job

Resources from NotebookLM

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

1. Abstract of Walton, Job, Session 26, God in the Book of Job, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

This lecture excerpt from John Walton's "The Book of Job" session 26 examines how God is portrayed in the book. Walton argues that God is a literary character shaped by the author, not a direct revelation of God's nature. He contends that seemingly negative depictions of God are rhetorical devices used to highlight the book's central message about God's justice and inscrutability, not to reflect God's actual character. Walton draws parallels to Jesus' parables, where extreme characterizations serve narrative purposes rather than theological descriptions. Ultimately, the lecture emphasizes understanding the book's message about God, rather than interpreting God's actions literally.

2. 13 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Walton's, Job, Session 26 – 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
n26.mp3**

3. Briefing Document

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the main themes and important ideas from the provided excerpt of John Walton's "Session 26: God in the Book of Job," focusing on the characterization of God within the Book of Job:

Briefing Document: John Walton on God in the Book of Job

Subject: Analysis of the Character of God in the Book of Job

Executive Summary:

This session from John Walton argues that the Book of Job should not be read as a literal account of God's actions or motivations, but rather as a literary construction with God as a character within a larger narrative. The book uses extreme scenarios to explore the nature of God's justice and human understanding of divine plans, not to reveal God's personal attributes. The portrayal of God should be viewed as a literary tool employed to convey theological ideas. The book's message is focused on what we as readers need to discover about God, not on what God needs to discover.

Key Themes and Ideas:

1. Initial Problems with God's Portrayal:

- Walton acknowledges the initial difficulty many readers have with God's actions in Job: "He wagers with a man's life. He ruins Job without cause by his own admission, including wiping out his family. He ignores Job's repeated pleas...He intimidates Job with what is perceived to be an 'I'm God, and you are not' speech."
- These actions make it difficult to reconcile this image with the God typically worshipped, leading to questions about the book's overall theological message.
- The central issue is, "Is this God's revelation of himself?" Walton argues for a different framing.

1. God as a Literary Character:

- Walton proposes shifting the focus from "Is this God's revelation of himself" to "what does this book reveal about God?" He contends that God should be viewed as a *character* within the narrative, just like Job and the other figures in the story. He states, "God is a character who has been rhetorically shaped in the literature. The author of the book has shaped the character of God."
- This perspective allows for a literary interpretation, rather than a literal one. God's actions are part of the narrative structure, designed for the purpose of the text, not necessarily indicative of God's actual behavior.

1. Re-evaluating God's Actions:

- **God's Need for Information:** The book depicts God as asking the challenger what he is up to, however, Walton argues it is a literary device: "The book presents him using conventional thinking about how the heavenly council operates to stage the conversation in the scene in heaven." The question has a "literary role" and is not meant to show God's ignorance.
- **God's "Wager":** Walton does not believe it is a wager; instead, "The literary role played by this, call it a wager...is to demonstrate from the start that Job's suffering is not the result of anything he has done." This sets up the central question of the book: "Does Job serve God for nothing?"
- **God's Motivation in the Test:** "The text offers answers to our questions, not to God's uncertainties." The book is more concerned with the reader's understanding of God's justice than God's need to discover Job's motivations.
- **God's Care:** It cannot be inferred from the text whether God cares about Job. Instead it is part of the "literary construct" created to "set the scene literarily"

1. The Role of Extremes:

- The extreme nature of Job's suffering, both in righteousness and loss, is intentionally portrayed in order to explore the issues thoroughly. "Nothing less than a total loss would provide the necessary factors for the wisdom instruction that is the focus."
- Extreme situations and characterizations are hallmarks of literary devices, like the parables of Jesus.

1. God's Unresponsiveness and "Intimidation":

- God's refusal to engage Job in litigation and explain the reason for his suffering is purposeful. "The message of the book intends to convey that message is not achieved by God giving explanations."
- God's "intimidating" speech is a "literary means rather than as a theological end." The point is not that God is unapproachable, but that "he is irreducible."

1. **Parallels with Jesus' Parables:**

- Walton draws a comparison between God's role in Job and the characterizations of God in Jesus' parables. In the parables, God is portrayed in different ways that do not reflect his literal actions or motivations. This supports his argument about Job, where God's actions serve the purpose of the story, not as a revelation of God's nature.
- Examples cited include:
 - The parable of the workers and wages (Matthew 20)
 - The parable of the shrewd manager (Luke 16)
 - The parable of the unmerciful servant (Matthew 18)
 - The parable of the late-night request (Luke 11)

1. **The Book's Message:**

- The core message of Job is not based on God's activities, but on the lessons it offers about God's plans, purposes, and policies: "The message of the book is not entailed in God's activities but in the information that it offers about God's plans, purposes, and his policies."
- God's ways are "more complicated than people can imagine." He is not accountable or in need of vindication by humans. We must trust in His wisdom.
- The book aims to guide readers to a deeper understanding of God rather than to provide a literal depiction of his character.

Conclusion:

Walton's analysis of God in the Book of Job argues that the text utilizes God as a literary character within a narrative that explores complex questions of justice and faith. It should not be read as a literal depiction of God's actions or attitudes. This approach allows the reader to focus on the book's message about God's purposes and humanity's relationship to the divine, without being distracted by the problematic elements of the literal narrative. The goal of the Book is not to provide information about what God needs to learn, but to lead us to a deeper understanding of God.

4. Job Study Guide: Session 26, God in the Book of Job

The Book of Job: A Study Guide

Short Answer Quiz

1. According to Walton, what are some of the initial, questionable actions attributed to God in the Book of Job?
2. Walton proposes we shift our focus from "Is this God's revelation of himself?" to what other question? Why does this matter?
3. How does Walton argue we should view the characters in the Book of Job, including God?
4. Explain Walton's perspective on the "wager" between God and Satan in Job. Is this a literal wager?
5. What is the key issue being explored in the Book of Job, according to Walton, and why is Job's suffering so extreme?
6. Why does Walton say God's unresponsiveness to Job's pleas is not an indication of heartlessness?
7. What does Walton mean when he states that the posture of Yahweh is a literary means rather than a theological end?
8. How does Walton use Jesus' parables to explain the literary nature of God's portrayal in Job?
9. According to Walton, what is more important than the actions of God as a character in the book of Job?
10. What are some key takeaways about God's nature and ways from the Book of Job, according to Walton?

Quiz Answer Key

1. Walton notes that God seems to ask what Satan is up to, wagers with Job's life, ruins Job without cause, ignores Job's pleas, intimidates Job, and restores Job's prosperity with no explanation. These actions make God look questionable.

2. Walton proposes we ask "What does this book reveal about God?" rather than "Is this God's revelation of himself?" This shift is important because it allows us to focus on what the author intended to communicate through the literary portrayal of God, rather than expecting a literal representation.
3. Walton argues that all characters in the Book of Job, including God, should be viewed as literary characters who are rhetorically shaped by the author to serve the purposes of the narrative.
4. Walton does not see the "wager" as a literal agreement, but rather as a literary device to establish that Job's suffering is not due to any wrongdoing on his part, and to explore whether Job serves God for nothing.
5. Walton states the key issue being explored is how God's justice interacts with our experiences and circumstances, and the extreme suffering was necessary to make it clear that Job had lost everything and set up a dialogue about those losses.
6. Walton explains that God's unresponsiveness is not heartlessness but a literary device that demonstrates that the pathway to a solution is not by drawing God into litigation and explanation.
7. When Walton states that the posture of Yahweh is a literary means rather than a theological end, he is indicating that God's portrayal as intimidating is a tool the author uses to demonstrate God's irreducibility, not a reflection of his true nature.
8. Walton uses the parables of Jesus to show how the character of God is exaggerated and portrayed for the sake of the story to teach a deeper lesson, and not to be taken as literal truths about how God works in reality.
9. According to Walton, what the author does with the character of God and the message the book intends to convey about God's plans, purposes, and policies are more important than the actions of God as a character.
10. Walton states that the book of Job teaches that God's ways are more complicated than we can imagine, that he's not in need of vindication, that he's not accountable to us, and that he has created the world as he deemed appropriate, and we must trust his wisdom.

Essay Questions

1. Analyze the literary strategies employed in the Book of Job to depict God. How does understanding God as a "character" in a literary work shift our interpretation of the text?
2. Explore the purpose of the "wager" between God and Satan. How does this literary device serve the themes and messages of the Book of Job, and why is it important that it is not a literal wager?
3. Compare and contrast the portrayal of God in the Book of Job with his portrayal in other books of the Bible (such as Psalms) to illustrate the nuanced and varied nature of biblical depictions of God.
4. Discuss how the Book of Job challenges traditional views of divine justice. How does the book's message offer insights into suffering, faith, and the human relationship with God?
5. Walton argues that the message of the Book of Job is not found in God's actions but in the information about God's plans, purposes, and policies. Based on your understanding, what are the key takeaways from the book regarding these plans, purposes, and policies?

Glossary of Key Terms

Literary Characterization: The process by which a writer develops the personality of a character. This includes physical description, actions, thoughts, speech, and interactions with other characters.

Literary Device/Construct: A technique used by a writer to create a specific effect or convey a particular message in their work, such as metaphor, simile, symbolism, and dramatic irony.

Rhetorically Shaped: When language and storytelling techniques are used to emphasize particular aspects of a character for the purpose of the narrative, thereby creating a specific impression.

Heavenly Council: A common literary motif in the ancient Near East and the Bible that describes a gathering of divine beings who advise and interact with God.

Literary Motif: A recurring idea, symbol, or theme within a literary work that contributes to its overall meaning and structure.

Wisdom Literature: A genre of biblical literature that focuses on practical wisdom, moral behavior, and reflections on the nature of life and existence.

Parable: A short, fictional story used to illustrate a moral or spiritual lesson.

Irreducible: Incapable of being simplified or diminished, often used to describe God's complex and incomprehensible nature.

5. FAQs on Walton, Job, Session 26, God in the Book of Job, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

- Why does God seem to behave questionably in the Book of Job, such as wagering with Satan and allowing Job's suffering?** The book of Job portrays God as a character within a literary construct. God's actions, such as the wager with Satan and the allowance of Job's suffering, are not necessarily intended as a direct reflection of God's true nature or how God operates. Rather, these are literary devices employed to set up the core issue: does Job serve God for nothing? The extreme nature of Job's suffering and the seemingly capricious actions of God are all part of the literary framework designed to explore the complexities of God's justice and humanity's relationship with God. The book focuses more on what readers discover about God's justice than what God discovers about Job's motivations.
- Does the Book of Job reveal that God needs to be informed about Satan's activities, or does it mean God doesn't know everything?** The book's depiction of God asking Satan about his activities is not meant to suggest that God is ignorant or in need of information. Instead, it is a literary device that uses conventional thinking about the heavenly council to set up a conversation. God is presented as a royal figure who receives reports, which serves a literary purpose. The question is meant to evoke a response from Satan and set the stage for the narrative, not to reveal God's lack of omniscience.
- Is the purpose of the Book of Job to determine if Job's faith is genuine, or does it serve a different purpose?** The book isn't intended to determine Job's motivations for God's sake; the text states God is not uncertain about Job. Rather, the readers are led on an investigation into how God's justice intersects with human experiences and circumstances. The book is structured to allow the readers to question and reflect, not to resolve any doubts God might have.
- Should we deduce God's feelings about Job from the actions God takes in the book, like allowing Job's ruin?** No. The actions taken by God in the book should not be interpreted as a direct reflection of God's feelings or level of care for Job. The scenario, including the introduction of suffering into Job's life, is a literary construct, which should be viewed with the same lens as characters within a play. This means that God's actions serve the narrative purposes of the story. The book isn't about whether God cares, but rather how God's justice is demonstrated.

- **Why is Job's suffering so extreme, and what is the significance of him losing everything?** The extreme nature of Job's suffering, including the loss of wealth, family, and health, is essential to the book's exploration of the problem of innocent suffering. If Job hadn't lost everything, the conversation around the issue would be incomplete. The extremity is a literary tool to provide a comprehensive view of the topic and is similar to the way parables of Jesus use hyperbole to convey their messages.
- **Why is God unresponsive to Job's pleas for explanation, and does it mean God is heartless?** God's lack of explanation isn't an indication of heartlessness, but it reveals that seeking an explanation through litigation is not the path to understanding God's ways. God does not give an explanation because giving one would undermine the message of the book; God's response has nothing to do with emotional responsiveness. The book's intent is to show that God's ways are often beyond human comprehension and cannot be reduced to a simple cause-and-effect relationship.
- **What does God's intimidating posture in his speeches reveal about God, and is it meant to make readers fear God?** God's intimidating posture in Yahweh's speeches is portrayed as a literary means to show that God is not tame or domesticated. God's speeches are not meant to make the reader abjectly grovel. This posture highlights God's irreducible nature, and it is a literary device that does not suggest God is unapproachable. The emphasis is on God's incomprehensible nature as opposed to accessibility.
- **How does the Book of Job relate to the parables of Jesus, and what can we learn from this connection?** Like the parables of Jesus, the Book of Job presents a constructed literary world, which allows the author to highlight particular themes. The focus isn't on the character's actions, but rather on the message the author intends to convey. Just as the parables shouldn't be used to compile a profile of God, God's actions in the Book of Job are not a direct depiction of his character. The message of the book is not tied to God's activities but in the information the book provides about God's plans and policies. Both use exaggeration, and extreme scenarios to engage the reader and to bring about an understanding of complex ideas about justice and faith.