

The Book of Job

Session 2: Date and Authorship

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Abstract

In this session, Dr. John Walton explores the concepts of date and authorship in the Book of Job within the context of the ancient Near Eastern world. He explains that the ancient world was a hearing-dominant culture where authority resided in speaking rather than writing, and that scribes compiled documents from oral traditions. While Job may be a unique literary exception composed as a unified book, Walton argues that its date of composition is likely later than the events it describes. Ultimately, because Job is a wisdom book containing timeless truths, he emphasizes that the authority of the text lies in its wisdom teaching rather than its precise historical origin.

Outline

- I. No Books and Authors in the Ancient World
 - A. The modern misconception of book and author in antiquity
 - 1. Ancient world is completely different from our modern context
 - 2. No "authors" or "books" in the modern sense
 - B. Scribes and Authority Figures
 - 1. Authority figures speak, scribes write
 - 2. Writings exist as documents (clay tablets, papyrus, wax tablets), not books
- II. Hearing-Dominant Culture
 - A. Mechanics of information transmission
 - 1. Information is received through speaking and hearing
 - 2. A spoken, heard message carries more authority than a written text
 - 3. Absence of concepts like intellectual property and copyright
 - B. Origin of biblical writings
 - 1. OT books began as oral speeches, then individual documents (accounts, prophecies, psalms)
 - 2. Compiled over centuries but preserve the original authoritative voice

3. The book is the end of the process, not the beginning

III. Job as a Unique Literary Exception

A. Unified Literary Construct

1. Speeches of Job and his friends work together as a whole piece
2. Job may have begun as a book, unlike most other Old Testament writings

B. Highly Composed Literature

1. Speeches contain highly literate, flowery, sophisticated language and poetry
2. Not typical extemporaneous speaking; they are literary constructs

IV. Literacy and Scribes in Antiquity

A. General Illiteracy

1. Society and culture did not depend on general reading or writing
2. Basic reading and writing, if learned, was rarely used and easily forgotten

B. Role and Access of Scribes

1. Scribes were professionals sought for legal or important documents
2. Written documents kept in scribal archives, inaccessible to the public
3. No libraries for public checkout; scribes copied texts to practice

V. Date and Authorship of the Book of Job

A. Date of Events vs. Date of Composition

1. Date of composition is likely different from the date of the historical events
2. Indicators of an early time period for the historical Job:
 - a. A small unit of money (kesitah) known from earlier periods
 - b. Raiding parties described as Sabeans and Chaldeans
3. Early setting does not mean the book was composed in an early period

B. Job's Non-Israelite Status

1. Job is not an Israelite; he is from the land of Uz
2. Absence of Israelite markers (covenant, law, temple) is appropriate and expected
3. Patriarchal priest role is fitting for non-Israelite tribal culture, not a proof of a pre-Sinai date

C. Israelite Audience of the Composition

1. Despite a non-Israelite character, the book has a clear Israelite orientation and is written to Israelites
2. This Israelite focus indicates a later composition date

VI. Job as a Wisdom Book: Timeless Truths

A. Purpose of Wisdom Literature

1. Not intended to simply recount a story
2. Contains timeless truths beneficial to anyone at any time

B. Irrelevance of Date and Authorship Debates

1. Reading the book for its wisdom teaching is what matters
2. The authority of the book resides in its wisdom teaching, not its date or authorship
3. Issues of date, authorship, compilation, and historical settings can be safely set aside