

The Book of Job

Session 3: Job as a Book with Authority and Inspiration

Author: Dr. John Walton

Source: Biblicalelearning.org by Ted Hildebrandt

Keywords

Job, John Walton, Inspiration, Authority, Revelation, Historicity, Parables, Wisdom, Syllabus, Obedience

Abstract

In this session, Dr. John Walton explores how the Book of Job can be considered inspired, authoritative, and a revelation of God, despite containing many speeches of wrongheaded thinking from Job and his friends. He argues that the book's authority and truth reside not in its historical accuracy or narrative events, but in its underlying wisdom message which transcends historical details. Using the analogy of a course syllabus, Walton explains that the Bible reveals God's ultimate plans and purposes to invite human partnership rather than disclosing an intimate insider look into His reasoning. Ultimately, recognizing the book's divine authority requires readers to submit to its wisdom teachings as a unified whole rather than picking and choosing sections to believe.

Outline

I. Introduction to the Problem

A. Dialogue Dynamics

1. Job's friends say many things that are wrong or misleading.
2. Job himself says things that are wrongheaded or incomplete.

B. Core Question

1. If much of the dialogue is wrong, how can we consider the Book of Job as true, authoritative, and inspired by God?

II. Defining Key Biblical Terms

A. Inspiration

1. Inspiration means the book has its ultimate source in God.
2. It does not require God to whisper thoughts or plant words in the minds of Job's friends.
3. Corresponds to the New Testament concept of 'God-breathed' (revelation coming from God).

B. Authority

1. Authority means the book provides trustworthy information we can rely on and must submit to.

2. It gives the book a rightful claim to speak, which stems from its divine inspiration.

C. Revelation

1. The Bible serves as God's true and dependable revelation of Himself.
2. The book's revelation and authority are vested in its overarching wisdom message rather than the literal correctness of individual speeches.

III. Navigating Wrongheaded Thinking in the Text

A. The Purpose of Wrongheaded Thinking

1. The text includes flawed arguments so that readers can identify and reject incorrect views of God.
2. Readers must carefully discern what the book actually affirms as true, rather than accepting every statement.

B. Untrustworthy Voices

1. Job's friends cannot be relied upon to speak the truth, though they occasionally do.
2. The friends' arguments are dangerous because they are often just a shade off from the truth.
3. The heavenly antagonist (the challenger) also cannot be trusted to represent truth consistently.

IV. The Nature of Authority and Historicity

A. Separation of Authority and Historical Events

1. The authority of the Book of Job does not depend on whether it is an accurate historical account of a real past.
2. Its purpose is to convey wisdom, not historical reporting; truth is presented through wisdom, not narrative.

B. Analogy to Jesus' Parables

1. Parables use realistic settings combined with unrealistic elements to make a theological point.
2. Like parables, Job's narrative structure works to convey a deeper wisdom teaching rather than historical facts.

C. The Transcendence of Wisdom

1. Wisdom looks past and beyond physical events to find deeper, unseen truths.
2. True wisdom does not come automatically from experiencing events, but from reflecting on them to understand God's perspective.

V. Limits on Knowing God

A. Obstacles to Comprehension

1. The book provides limited information on who God is, focusing instead on how He works.
2. Humans face immense barriers in knowing God because He is God and we are not.
3. Believing we fully understand God often means we have created Him in our own image.

B. The Bible as a Course Syllabus

1. A syllabus reveals the teacher's plans, purposes, and requirements to enable active student partnership.
2. Similarly, the Bible is a 'syllabus' revealing God's kingdom plans and purposes, and our role within them.
3. It provides sufficient information for active partnership without giving an intimate insider look at God's inner reasoning.

VI. Implications of Biblical Authority

A. A Call to Submission

1. Acknowledging biblical authority means we do not have the freedom to pick and choose which parts to obey.
2. Just as citizens cannot choose which taxes to pay, believers must submit to the entire message.

B. Focus on the Wisdom Message

1. The authority of Job is found in its complete wisdom teaching, teaching us how to think and act when suffering.