

The Book of Job

Session 6: The Purpose of the Book of Job

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Abstract

In this session, Dr. John Walton explores the core purpose of the Book of Job, which is to teach readers how to think appropriately about God and His policies when disaster strikes. He explains that the narrative is driven by two competing accusations: the challenger's claim that rewarding the righteous corrupts their motivations, and Job's claim that allowing the righteous to suffer is an unjust policy. Rather than representing God as using a raw power card, the book's resolution presents a trust card, calling on believers to trust in God's supreme wisdom and power even in times of ignorance and suffering. Ultimately, the book is about proving the true nature of disinterested righteousness and demonstrating that God's policies are trustworthy.

Outline

I. Introduction

- **A. Transition to Core Issues**
 - **1.** Moving beyond setting, genre, date, and authorship to address the book's purpose.
 - **2.** The purpose of the Book of Job is accomplished through its structural design and rhetorical strategy.

II. The Primary Purpose of the Book of Job

- **A. Proper Thinking in Suffering**
 - **1.** Designed to help readers learn how to think well about God when disaster strikes.
 - **2.** Focuses on exploring God's policies and how He works in the world.
- **B. The Human Dilemma**
 - **1.** Humans expect an all-powerful, good God to prevent suffering.
 - **2.** The book addresses what God is doing when undeserving people face immense hardship.

III. The Challenger's Accusation (Accusation against Prosperity)

- **A. The Question of Motivation**
 - **1.** The challenger (the satan/antagonist) asks: "Does Job serve God for nothing?"
 - **2.** Probes the direct motivation behind Job's righteousness.

- **B. Critique of God's Policy**

- **1.** The challenger questions if it is good policy for God to bring prosperity to righteous people.
- **2.** Argues that rewarding righteousness trains people to become "mercenaries" with ulterior motives.
- **3.** Proposes that rewarding good behavior corrupts true righteousness because people focus on benefits rather than the righteousness itself.

- **C. The Strategy of Testing**

- **1.** The only way to know if Job is truly righteous is to take away his benefits.
- **2.** The book is not primarily about suffering, but about the nature and mettle of Job's righteousness.

IV. Job's Accusation (Accusation against Suffering)

- **A. The Problem of Righteous Suffering**

- **1.** Following his losses, Job raises a different challenge to God's policies.
- **2.** Job asks if it is a good idea to let righteous people—who are "on God's team"—suffer.

- **B. The Resulting Theological Gridlock**

- **1.** The challenger argues it is bad policy to let the righteous prosper.
- **2.** Job argues it is bad policy to let the righteous suffer.
- **3.** This gridlock forces the book to address how humans should think about God when things go wrong.

V. The Resolution of the Book

- **A. Rejection of the "Power Card"**

- **1.** Some readers believe the book ends with a simple "I'm God, you're not" statement that dismisses human worth or demands silence.
- **2.** Walton rejects the idea that God is simply pulling a raw power card.

- **B. Presentation of the "Trust Card"**

- **1.** The book's ending is actually a "compassion card" and a "trust card."
- **2.** God reveals Himself as supremely wise and powerful, inviting Job to trust Him even when he cannot understand.

VI. Conclusion

- **A. The Goal of Trust**

- **1.** The purpose is to help us view God as trustworthy and reliable in the most desperate times of life.
- **2.** Prevents readers from blaming God or questioning His policies when suffering occurs.