

The Book of Job

Session 12: Role of the Wife and Friends

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Abstract

In this session, Dr. John Walton analyzes the distinct literary and theological roles played by Job's wife and his three friends. He argues that rather than being actual counseling models, these characters act as literary foils and unwitting surrogates for the Challenger's agenda by trying to reduce Job's relationship with God to a transaction for material benefits. While his friends argue that Job must repent to get his 'stuff' back, his wife represents a quick escape, urging him to curse God and die. Ultimately, their pressure serves to test the purity of Job's righteousness, proving that his devotion transcends material prosperity.

Outline

I. Introduction

- A. Focus of the Session: Analyzing the characters of Job's wife and his three friends.
- B. Plot Introduction: These characters are introduced at the end of chapter two to play specific roles in the unfolding narrative.
- C. Literary Assumption: Approaching these characters as intentional literary constructs rather than historical transcriptions.

II. The Friends as Individuals

- A. Necessity of Individual Profiles: The author includes three distinct friends because each has a unique, intentional role to play.
- B. Eliphaz: Experience
 - 1. Focuses on the weight and authority of personal experience.
 - 2. Base conversation on their own life stories, observations, and conclusions.
- C. Bildad: Wisdom of the Ages
 - 1. Appeals to historical and philosophical wisdom passed down through generations.
 - 2. Presents arguments from the standpoint of an educated person delivering established consensus.
- D. Zophar: Systematization

1. Inclined to organize understanding into strict, systematic thinking.
2. Views things in black-and-white terms through a correctly organized theological system.

III. The Friends' Role as a Group

- A. Representing Ancient Wisdom: Corporately, the friends represent the elite sages and specialists of the ancient Near Eastern world.
- B. Serving as Foils and Fools: Despite their high reputation, the book plays and ultimately rejects their wisdom as shallow, inadequate, and built on flawed assumptions.
- C. Functioning as the Challenger's Philosophical Representatives
 1. Grounded in the Retribution Principle: They operate on the absolute assumption that people get what they deserve.
 2. Unwarranted Conclusions: Because Job is suffering, they assume he must have committed grievous, hidden sins.
 3. Focus on Material Wealth ('Stuff'): They advise Job to confess his sins solely to secure the return of his lost possessions and prosperity.
 4. Pushing the Challenger's Agenda: By persuading Job to prioritize material recovery over genuine righteousness, they inadvertently work to prove the Challenger correct.

IV. Misconceptions about the Friends

- A. Not Counselor Role Models: The friends are not included so that modern readers can learn practical tips on how not to counsel.
- B. Role Players: They must be understood as role players who execute critical literary, theological, philosophical, and rhetorical functions to let the book's main teachings emerge.

V. The Role of Job's Wife

- A. Stepping onto the Scene of Loss: Pushes Job after he has already suffered severe physical pain and lost all of his prosperity and children.
- B. Role Player, Not Partner: She is not depicted as a mourning life partner, but as a specific role player pushing Job in the Challenger's direction.
- C. The Quick and Easy Solution: Her directive to 'curse God and die' represents an attempt to push Job over the brink into final apostasy.
- D. Working in Tandem with the Friends and Challenger
 1. Jointly assumes that physical and material benefits are the essential core of the human-divine relationship.
 2. Job's Response: Rejects her counsel as that of a foolish woman, famously asking, 'Shall we accept good from God and not trouble?'
 3. Refusing Accountability: Job maintains his integrity by refusing to hold God transactional or accountable.
- E. Five-Fold Rhetorical Role of the Wife:

1. Avoids a quick and simple win for the Challenger, demonstrating that the trial will not be easily resolved.
2. Provides Job a distinct opportunity to reassert and express his deeper, non-transactional faithfulness.
3. Serves as a logical narrative prelude and transition to the arrival of the three friends.
4. Proposes a solution (death/escape) that is polar opposite to the friends' later advice (repentance for the recovery of benefits).
5. Reinforces the central transactional assumption of the Challenger's wager by treating benefits as indispensable.

VI. Conclusion

- A. Unwitting Surrogates: Both the wife and friends act as unwitting agents executing the Challenger's expectations.
- B. Narrative Setup: With the heavenly scenes completed and the earthly characters in position, the dialogue is primed to unfold in chapter three.
- C. Challenger's Disappearance: The Challenger has no further role in the book; his arguments are exclusively sustained by his earthly surrogates.