

# The Book of Job

*Session 13: Dialogue Series 1, Job 3-14*

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## Abstract

In this session, Dr. John Walton examines the first cycle of dialogues in Job chapters 3 through 14, beginning with Job's raw and soul-rending lament. He highlights the linguistic nuances of the Hebrew text, including the three distinct terms for cursing and alternative translations of famous passages like Job 4:17 and 13:15. Through detailed summaries of each speaker's contributions, Walton demonstrates how Job's friends focus heavily on material restoration and the retribution principle, while Job rejects this transactional theology to maintain the purity of his disinterested righteousness.

## Outline

### I. Job's Lament (Job 3)

#### A. Cursing the Day of Birth

1. Distinct lexical terms for cursing in Hebrew:
  - a. Barak: literal blessing, used as a euphemism to avoid direct curse of God.
  - b. Qalal: incantation using words of power.
  - c. 'Arar: removing from God's protection; disruption of order.
2. Rousing Leviathan: invoking the ancient Near Eastern symbol of chaos and non-order.

#### B. Expressing the Wish of Non-Existence

1. Expresses desire to have gone straight from the womb to the netherworld.
2. Compares preferred state to a stillborn child or miscarriage.

#### C. The Misery of Present Life

1. Serves as a rhetorical transition from prose prologue (narrative) to direct dialogue (poetry).
2. Shows transition of Job from a confident figure to a distraught, questioning sufferer.
3. Highlights the absence of any Israelite or ancient Near Eastern hope for afterlife/eternity.
4. Illustrates Job's search for an escape, rather than eternal compensation.

5. Focuses on the repeated 'why?' question, which the Book of Job reframes as the incorrect question.

## **II. Job's Integrity and Disinterested Righteousness**

### **A. Definition of Integrity in the Narrative**

1. Not equivalent to moral perfection or blamelessness.
2. Defined strictly as the insistence that his righteousness stands on its own, independent of reward.

### **B. Job's Wrongheaded Accusations**

1. Job goes to dark places in his thoughts about God.
2. God eventually accuses Job of wrongdoing in how he responded to Him.
3. What remains crucial is that Job's righteousness remains disinterested.

## **III. Introduction to the First Dialogue Cycle (Job 4-14)**

### **A. Alternating Pattern of the Cycle**

1. Eliphaz speaks, Job responds.
2. Bildad speaks, Job responds.
3. Zophar speaks, Job responds.

## **IV. Exegesis of Key Statements in the First Cycle**

### **A. Job 4:6 (Eliphaz's speech)**

1. Traditional: 'Should not your piety be your confidence...?'
2. Extended Paraphrase: Eliphaz accuses Job of having an irrational confidence based on self-proclaimed piety.

### **B. Job 4:17 (Eliphaz's mystical experience)**

1. Traditional: 'Can a mortal be more righteous than God? Can a man be more pure than his Maker?'
2. Problem: Everyone knows a human cannot be more righteous than God; furthermore, God is never designated as pure ('tahar' - a condition achieved from an unclean state).
3. Alternate Walton Translation: 'Can a mortal be righteous in God's perspective? Can a man be clean in the perspective of his Maker?'

### **C. Job 7:17 (Job's speech)**

1. Reverses the positive theme of Psalm 8 ('What is mankind that you make so much of them?').
2. Job turns this to complain about God's overly attentive, microscopic scrutiny.
3. Rejects his treatment as a chaos creature, viewing God as a hostile 'watcher of men' rather than a protector.

### **D. Job 7:20 (Job's speech)**

1. Traditional: 'If I have sinned...'

2. Alternate Walton Translation: 'I have sinned' (meaning falling out of favor) and asks why God will not pardon whatever imputed sin has been judged as indictable.

E. Job 13:15 (Job's speech)

1. Traditional: 'Though he slays me, I will hope in him.'
2. Textual variations are driven by the homophones 'lo' (to him) and 'l'o' (not).
3. Alternate Walton Translation: 'Even though he may slay me, I will not wait in silence.' Job gathers courage to confront and argue his case directly with God.

## V. Rhetorical Summary of Individual Speeches in Cycle 1

A. Eliphaz's Speech vs. Job's Response

1. Eliphaz: You have counseled others, now take your own advice; trust the retribution principle; no mortal is righteous before God; accept His discipline.
2. Job: My misery justifies my outcry; I wish God would put me to death so I could die realistically; my friends are useless; show me what I have done wrong.

B. Bildad's Speech vs. Job's Response

1. Bildad (appealing to ancestral wisdom): God does not pervert justice; your children died because they sinned; come clean and you will be restored.
2. Job: No one can establish righteousness before God; He is too strong to call to account; He destroys both blameless and wicked; I wish for an advocate.

C. Zophar's Speech vs. Job's Response

1. Zophar (systematic black-and-white view): You are arrogant; you have actually received less punishment than you deserve; repent of your sin.
2. Job: My friends mock me and speak presumptuously for God; the wicked escape; if I could bring my case before God, I would have an airtight defense.

## VI. Theological Conclusion of Cycle 1

A. Focus on Benefits and 'Stuff'

1. All three friends end their speeches by painting a rosy picture of the rewards of repentance.
2. The friends' priority is transactional: urge Job to repent so he can get his wealth and possessions back.

B. Job's Rejection of Transactional Theology

1. Job concludes the cycle by making it clear that he is not motivated by the recovery of material benefits.
2. His refusal to play along proves that his righteousness is indeed disinterested, allowing the book's theological test to advance.