

The Book of Job

Session 14: Dialogue Series 2, Job 15-21

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Abstract

In this session, Dr. John Walton explores the second cycle of dialogues in Job chapters 15 through 21, summarizing each speech and outlining the rhetorical strategies of both Job and his three friends. He highlights how the friends increasingly align Job with the wicked based on his suffering, while Job continues to question the consistency of the retribution principle by pointing out the prosperity of the wicked. Walton emphasizes the critical distinction between Job's desire for vindication (the defense of his righteousness) and his friends' push for restoration (the recovery of material wealth). Ultimately, this divergence showcases Job's unwavering commitment to disinterested righteousness, preserving his integrity despite his deteriorating view of God.

Outline

- I. Introduction to Dialogue Series 2 (Job 15-21)
 - A. Context of the Second Cycle
 - 1. Structure matches Cycle 1, featuring alternating speeches by Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, with Job responding to each.
 - 2. Focus of the study shifts to the overarching rhetorical strategies of the speakers rather than specific verse analysis.
- II. Cycle 2: Eliphaz's Accusation and Job's Response
 - A. Eliphaz's Second Speech
 - 1. Condemns Job's words as disgraceful, wind-filled bluster that only worsens his situation.
 - 2. Accuses Job of arrogance and self-righteousness, asking what makes him superior to others.
 - 3. Argues that Job's suffering is a consequence of the universal corruption shared by all humanity.

- 4. Urges Job to recognize his guilt by comparing his treatment with the severe fate of the wicked.
- B. Job's Response to Eliphaz
 - 1. Dismisses Eliphaz's words as empty and unencouraging, stating that supportive talk is easy.
 - 2. Accuses God of actively attacking, tearing, and tormenting him alongside his enemies.
 - 3. Pleads for an advocate or defender to take up his case and stand up for him against God.
 - 4. Declares his unwavering determination to stay the course of righteousness, even though death is his only biological expectation.
- C. Nutshell Exchange
 - 1. Eliphaz's advice: Acknowledge your guilt because God's treatment of you aligns you with the wicked.
 - 2. Job's response: I need an advocate to protect me from God's unjust attacks.
- III. Cycle 2: Bildad's Argument and Job's Response
 - A. Bildad's Second Speech
 - 1. Shortens his remarks but intensifies his stance.
 - 2. Asserts that God's judgment of the wicked is absolute and severe.
 - 3. Concludes that those who suffer such severe judgment—including Job—must be classified as people who do not truly know God.
 - B. Job's Response to Bildad
 - 1. Reasserts his absolute innocence despite the ongoing, harsh accusations from his friends.
 - 2. Attributes his ruined state entirely to God's inexplicable, overwhelming anger.
 - 3. Describes himself as a social outcast, completely despised and abandoned by family and community.
 - 4. Expresses absolute confidence that a living defender (redeemer) will arise to vindicate him in the end.
 - 5. Warns his friends that they are in greater spiritual and judicial jeopardy than he is for their false accusations.
 - C. Nutshell Exchange
 - 1. Bildad's advice: Give up your false pretense of innocence; you are clearly among the doomed, wicked class.
 - 2. Job's response: God is the one who has ruined me; a defender will arise to vindicate me from your false charges.
- IV. Cycle 2: Zophar's Critique and Job's Response
 - A. Zophar's Second Speech
 - 1. Expresses deep offense at Job's continuous self-defense.
 - 2. Reasserts that the moral rules of the universe are fixed: pride and self-righteousness are the defining characteristics of the wicked.

- 3. Concludes that Job's pride itself serves as proof of his wicked character.
- B. Job's Response to Zophar
 - 1. Ignores Zophar's personal insults and focuses on a profound counter-observation.
 - 2. Points out that many wicked and arrogant people actually prosper, live long, and mock God with impunity.
 - 3. Reaches his closest point to openly denying the standard Retribution Principle.
 - 4. Argues that if God does not consistently punish the wicked, there is no logical basis to assume He consistently protects or prospers the righteous.
 - 5. Explains that trying to call God to account in such an unpredictable, broken world is a complex and terrifying endeavor.
- C. Nutshell Exchange
 - 1. Zophar's advice: Your pride is your defining sin, and God's judgment proves you are wicked.
 - 2. Job's response: The moral distribution system is fundamentally broken.
- V. Theological Summary of Cycle 2
 - A. Gridlock on the Retribution Principle
 - 1. The entire cycle hinges on the rigid assumption that God immediately punishes the wicked and rewards the righteous.
 - 2. Friends' Inference: Since Job is suffering, he is under judgment and must be wicked.
 - 3. Job's Counter-Inference: Since I am righteous and suffering, and the wicked are prospering, God's administration of justice is deeply flawed.
 - B. The Deterioration of Job's View of God
 - 1. Job's description of God becomes increasingly dark and hostile, viewing Him as an unfair attacker.
 - 2. Despite this dark view, Job stubbornly refuses to abandon his assertion of personal righteousness.
 - 3. This steadfast stance corresponds to Job 'building a fort' in his corner of the Retribution Triangle.
- VI. Key Distinction: Vindication versus Restoration
 - A. The Concept of Restoration (The Friends' Focus)
 - 1. Defined as getting one's 'stuff' back—health, family, status, and wealth.
 - 2. The friends urge Job to confess and appease God solely as a transaction to achieve restoration.
 - 3. In their view, asserting innocence (vindication) is an unrealistic, proud, and vain hope.
 - B. The Concept of Vindication (Job's Focus)
 - 1. Defined as the formal, legal declaration that Job is righteous, irrespective of material possessions.

- 2. Job rejects confession because lying about sins he did not commit would violate his moral integrity.
- 3. Job is willing to die without his possessions, provided God legally vindicates his character.
- C. Preserving Integrity and Disinterested Righteousness
 - 1. Job's preference for vindication over restoration is the ultimate proof of his integrity.
 - 2. It proves his righteousness is completely disinterested, demonstrating that he does not serve God merely for material benefits.