

The Book of Job

Session 15: Job 19:25—I know my Redeemer lives

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Abstract

In this session, Dr. John Walton provides a contextual analysis of Job 19:25, a passage often famously associated with Jesus Christ due to translation choices and musical adaptations like Handel's Messiah. Walton explains that the Hebrew term goel refers to a legal advocate who rights a wrong done to a person, distinguishing Job's search for immediate vindication from the Christian concept of salvation and forgiveness of sins. He evaluates several interpretations of the advocate's identity, proposing that Job is looking for a mediator from the divine council to testify on his behalf while he is still alive. Ultimately, the session demonstrates that Job's hope is for a last-minute reprieve and restoration to divine favor in his physical body before death.

Outline

I. Introduction to Job 19:25

- A. Familiarity of the passage through translations (NIV) and Handel's Messiah.
- B. Necessity of interpreting the verse within the legal context of the Book of Job.

II. Views on the Identity and Role of the Advocate (Goel)

- A. Personification of Job's Cry (D. J. Cline):** The cry of innocence itself stands as an impersonal advocate.
- B. God as Advocate:** Traditional but highly problematic since God cannot be a mediator against Himself when accused of injustice.
- C. Human Relative:** Historically, a goel performed legal functions to protect family rights, but Job's relatives have all abandoned him.
- D. Elihu as Advocate:** Elihu later projects himself into this role but seeks a different outcome than Job's desired vindication.
- E. Member of the Divine Council (Walton's Preferred View):**
 - 1. Job looks for an advocate within the heavenly realm where decisions are made.
 - 2. Supported by Elihu in Job 33:23-24, though discarded as a viable option early on by Eliphaz in Job 5:1 and 22:2-3.

3. Eliphaz argues that proving God wrong through a mediator brings no favorable gain.

III. The Irony and Theological Risk of an Advocate

- A. Job is unaware that a member of the heavenly court (the Challenger) initiated his suffering.
- B. A victory for Job via a mediator would prove God wrong, rendering God unworthy of worship (if Job wins, God loses).

IV. The Misconception of the "Redeemer" as Jesus

- A. Capitalization of "Redeemer" in English translations is a late interpretive choice, as Hebrew lacks capital letters.
- B. No New Testament author or passage connects Jesus to the Redeemer in Job 19.

C. Distinct Roles:

1. A biblical goel works to right a wrong done to a person (vindication of the innocent).
2. Jesus works to right a wrong committed by a person (forgiveness of sins/justification).
3. Job insists on his absolute innocence; admitting sin to seek justification would mean losing his legal case.

V. Interpreting "Yet in My Flesh I Will See God"

A. Rejected Interpretations:

1. Physical Resurrection: Unsupported by broader Old Testament theology.
2. Posthumous Vindication: Vindication occurring only after Job's death.

B. Walton's Interpretation: A last-minute reprieve:

1. "After my skin has been destroyed" refers to Job's active flaying of his peeling skin using a potsherd.
2. "In my flesh, I will see God" is a hyperbolic expression of being restored to God's favor and no longer being treated as a stranger before he dies.
3. This physical restoration occurs while Job is alive, and material prosperity has nothing to do with this core desire.

VI. Conclusion

- A. Jesus' death and resurrection solve the problem of sin but do not explain the origin of suffering or how to think about God during trials.
- B. Job seeks vindication (proving he did not deserve suffering) rather than justification (being saved from offenses).