

The Book of Job

Session 17: Conclusion of the Dialogues Series, Wisdom Interlude Chapter 28

Author: Dr. John Walton

Source: Biblicalelearning.org by Ted Hildebrandt

Keywords

Job, Wisdom, Adonai, Order, Fear, Retribution, Justice, Narrator

Abstract

This session marks the transition from the finished dialogue series to the discourse section of the Book of Job, focusing on the wisdom interlude of Chapter 28. Dr. John Walton explains that this "Hymn to Wisdom" acts as a narrator's intermission, moving the book's core focus from a human search for justice to the divine source of wisdom. The chapter highlights that the cosmos is grounded in God's wisdom and order rather than a simplistic system of retribution. Ultimately, Walton demonstrates that true wisdom is found in the fear of Adonai, which calls for submitting to and trusting God's policies even in the midst of unexplained suffering.

Outline

I. Review of the Completed Dialogue Series

A. Completion of Dialogues

1. The conversation between Job and his friends is officially complete.
2. Job did not yield to the pressure of seeking renewed material benefits.

B. Breakdown of the Retribution Principle

1. Job concluded that the system of the retribution principle is fundamentally broken.
2. Job refused to admit to false wrongdoing as the cause of his sudden calamity.
3. Job successfully demonstrated disinterested righteousness, serving as a star witness for the defense of God's policies.
4. The Challenger's claim that rewarding righteousness is counterproductive is cast aside, and the friends are silenced.

II. The Hymn to Wisdom (Job 28) as Narrator's Intermission

A. Speaker Identity

1. Chapter 28 does not introduce a new speaker, making it appear that Job is still speaking.

2. However, the viewpoints expressed in this chapter do not align with Job's thoughts before or after.

3. Best understood as the work of the narrator providing an intermission to transition the reader's thinking.

B. Structure of Chapter 28

1. Mining Illustration (vv. 1-11): Demonstrates that human effort can bring hidden things to light.

2. Rhetorical Questions (vv. 12-19): Establishes that wisdom is inaccessible to humans and beyond value, effort, or ingenuity.

3. Divine Path to Wisdom (vv. 20-28): Proposes that God provides the true path to wisdom, with the fear of God as its foundation.

III. The Nexus of Wisdom and Order

A. Contrast Between Search and Source

1. Wisdom cannot be searched out by human ingenuity (v. 12) but has its ultimate source in God (v. 20).

2. Wisdom is found in the ordering of the cosmos, establishing a core biblical connection between wisdom and order.

3. Wisdom is pursued, perceived, and practiced through order (an ordered world, life, and society).

B. Creation Approved by Wisdom, Not Justice

1. Job and his friends erroneously assumed that the cosmos is ordered by the retribution principle (justice).

2. In verse 27, God appraises and confirms wisdom, approving creation by the criterion of wisdom, not justice.

3. The simple justice equation utilized by Job and his friends is shown to be entirely inadequate.

IV. The Fear of the Lord as Wisdom

A. Defining 'Fear of the Lord' via Contrasts

1. Fearing God is in contrast to thinking of Him as detached (to be ignored).

2. Fearing God is in contrast to thinking of Him as incompetent (to be treated with disdain).

3. Fearing God is in contrast to thinking of Him as limited or impotent (to be scorned).

4. Fearing God is in contrast to thinking of Him as corrupt (to be admonished).

5. Fearing God is in contrast to thinking of Him as short-sighted (to be advised).

6. Fearing God is in contrast to thinking of Him as petty (to be resented).

7. Fearing God means taking Him seriously as God and avoiding the trap of thinking Him less than God.

B. Lexical Choice of 'Adonai'

1. Verse 28 commands the fear of 'Adonai' (Lord/Master) rather than Yahweh, Elohim, or Shaddai.

2. This represents the only occurrence of the word Adonai in the entire Book of Job.
3. The phrase is put directly in the mouth of God, representing the only time in the Old Testament He refers to Himself simply as Adonai without other labels.
4. Adonai draws out the theme of authority and calls for submission to His mastership.

C. Ethical Parallels

1. The fear of Adonai is paired with the ethical exhortation 'to shun evil' rather than with ritual observances.

V. Rhetorical and Theological Roles of Chapter 28

A. Transitions and Shifts

1. Mechanically transitions the narrative from the human dialogues to the monologues/discourses.
2. Shifts the focus from the Challenger's contention (prosperous righteousness) to Job's contention (righteous suffering).
3. Shifts the book's search from human justice to the divine source of wisdom in cosmic ordering.

B. Addressing Job's Challenge

1. With Job's disinterested righteousness proven, the book moves on to address whether there can be coherence when the righteous suffer.
2. Serves notice that Job's human expectations cannot dictate how God proceeds, as God's wisdom rules.
3. Reveals that the friends' simple perception of order and coherence is deeply flawed and inadequate.

VI. God as the Source of Wisdom and Expressing Trust

A. Defining God's Character

1. God is the author of order and the foundation for coherence.
2. Statements like 'God is wise, good, or holy' can understate His nature, as these adjectives find their definitions in God Himself.

B. Practical Application of Trust

1. Fearing the Lord is expressed by trusting Him through uncomfortable or confusing circumstances.
2. Trust calls for accepting that we do not need a logical explanation for our trials.
3. Trust means recognizing that His just nature is unassailable, even when justice is not visible in our present circumstances.
4. Trust means believing He set up the system in the wisest possible way, even when suffering in a world broken by the fall.