

The Book of Job

Session 23: Epilogue, Job 42

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Abstract

In this session, Dr. John Walton examines the prose epilogue of Job 42, explaining that its primary function is to tie up narrative loose ends rather than deliver the core theological message of the book. He addresses translation difficulties regarding the Hebrew term nekoneh, clarifying that God approves of Job's final penitent words spoken directly to Him rather than endorsing his speeches throughout the dialogues. Walton argues that the restoration of Job's prosperity is not a reinstallation of the retribution principle, but rather demonstrates that prosperity is a sovereign gift of divine pleasure and that the cosmos is ordered by God's wisdom rather than human concepts of justice.

Outline

I. Introduction to the Epilogue (Job 42:7-17)

A. Role of the Epilogue

1. Prose portion concluding the book.
2. Ties up narrative loose ends rather than delivering the main theological message.

II. Reprimand and Reconciliation of the Friends (vv. 7-9)

A. The Divine Rebuke

1. God expresses anger toward Eliphaz and his two friends.
2. Accuses them of not speaking what is right (nekonah).
3. Directs them to offer sacrifices (seven bulls and seven rams).
4. Job acts as mediator, praying for them to avert divine folly.

B. The Exclusion of Elihu

1. Elihu is notably absent from the reprimand.
2. Implies that Elihu's words concerning God were correct or did not warrant the same rebuke.

III. Translation and Interpretation of "Truth" (Nekoneh)

A. Linguistic Analysis of Nekoneh

1. Means "logical, sensible, and verifiable."

B. The Preposition Shift

1. The Hebrew preposition indicates speaking "to me" (God) rather than speaking "about me."

2. Highlights that Job spoke rightly to God in his final penitence (Job 42:1-6).
3. The friends are chastised because they failed to offer a comparable penitent response to God.
4. Clarifies that God does not endorse everything Job said throughout the dialogues.

IV. Rhetorical Strategy: Restoring Prosperity

A. Address to the "Hollow" Restoration

1. Restoring wealth does not undo the pain of suffering or the loss of children.
2. Fits within the framework of a "thought experiment" rather than historical biography.

B. Reinstating God's Challenged Policies

1. Retribution principle is not reinstalled as a cosmic foundation.
2. Both the Challenger's and Job's absolute claims are proven untenable.
3. Restoring prosperity shows that God's sovereign policies remain unchanged; He is not bound by human expectations of retribution.

V. Prosperity Re-conceptualized as a Gift

A. Deconstruction of Merit

1. Job must view his restored wealth as a sovereign gift, not a reward he earned.
2. Prosperity is not a divine obligation, but a manifestation of God's pleasure.

B. No Guarantee of Future Compensation

1. The book does not teach that suffering believers will eventually be physically compensated on earth.
2. Shifts focus from modeling Job's behavior to learning how to think accurately about God.

VI. Crumpling the "Triangle of Claims"

A. Rejection of the Triangle

1. God refuses to occupy a corner of the humanly constructed triangle (Justice, Righteousness, Retribution).
2. God completely rejects and crumbles the triangle.

B. Wisdom over Justice

1. The cosmos is ordered by divine wisdom, not human-centered justice.
2. Apparent instances of retribution are merely the ripple effects of God's character and wisdom.
3. No past-oriented explanation for suffering is provided to Job or the reader.

VII. Conclusion: The Perfect Ending

A. Dispelling Misconceptions

1. The epilogue addresses the final challenges to God's policies and dispels foolish thinking.
2. Wisdom helps believers avoid rejecting God during times of intense suffering, even when explanations are withheld.