

The Book of Job

Session 24: Job in the Book of Job

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Abstract

In this session, Dr. John Walton analyzes the character and narrative function of Job, explaining that Job's primary role is to pose the book's core problem rather than provide its final solution. Walton explores the distinction between Job's disinterested righteousness and ancient Near Eastern concepts of transactional piety, showing how his fastidious rituals suggest a potential theological vulnerability regarding God's character. Although Job successfully preserves his integrity by refusing to serve God for material benefits, he ultimately slips into self-righteousness by denigrating God's justice to defend his own innocence. Ultimately, the session demonstrates that the book is about God's sovereign policies rather than human responses, directing readers to trust in divine wisdom rather than idealizing Job.

Outline

- **I. Introduction to the Character Summaries**
 - **A.** Transitioning to a series of thematic character and contextual summaries within the Book of Job.
 - **B.** Upcoming segments will sequentially cover Job, the nature of the world, and finally, the character and policies of God.
- **II. Job's Role in the Book**
 - **A.** Posing the Problem: Job's primary literary role is to raise and illustrate the book's central dilemma, not to provide the ultimate theological answer.
 - **B.** Wrong Way to Respond: His specific arguments and viewpoints represent an incorrect and inadequate human response to suffering.
 - **C.** Basis of Commendation: Job is commended by God not for how he responded to his suffering, but for the purity of his initial disinterested righteousness and for his eventual humble recanting.
 - **D.** Incorrect Prescription: Job's belief that God was unjust and his prescription that the remedy to his pain lay in confronting God in court are both shown to be incorrect.
 - **E.** Not a Primary Model: Readers must be careful not to take their cues on suffering or divine justice directly from Job.
- **III. The Nature of Job's Righteousness**

- **A. Distinction from the World:** His righteousness represents a high ethical standard that distinguishes him from his surrounding cultural environment, as detailed in his Job 31 oath of innocence.
- **B. Not Absolute Perfection:** Job does not possess absolute righteousness in the eyes of God, nor does the book identify him as sinless.
- **C. Contrast with Benefits:** His righteousness stands in direct contrast to material rewards, exploring whether righteousness has independent value when benefits are removed.
- **D. Desire for Legal Innocence:** Job does not claim to be flawless, but simply wants to be declared legally innocent of the heinous offenses that would justify his sudden, tragic downfall.
- **E. Omission of Motivation:** The text does not explain what motivates Job's righteousness if material gain is absent; establishing that benefits are not his motivator is sufficient to make the book's theological point.
- **IV. Job's Piety and Ancient Near Eastern Ritual**
 - **A. Defining Piety:** Piety is used in the ancient Near Eastern sense of fastidious ritual performance to maintain good standing with the gods.
 - **B. The Great Symbiosis:** Traditional ancient piety was seen as insurance against the fragile egos and unpredictable volatility of the gods.
 - **C. Strangely Absent in Dialogues:** Although Job is ritually conscientious to a fault in chapter one, ritual piety is never proposed as a remedy for his suffering by Job or his three friends.
 - **D. A Potential Theological Vulnerability:** Job's obsessive, preventative sacrifices on behalf of his children (Job 1:4-5) reveal an anxiety that God might act on a minor technicality or a capricious whim.
 - **E. The Challenger's Logical Inference:** If Job operates under the fear that God is inclined to be petty and easily offended, the Challenger has logical grounds to question if Job's righteousness is similarly motivated by fear of divine attack rather than genuine devotion.
- **V. The Preservation of Job's Integrity**
 - **A. Defining Integrity:** Job's integrity consists of his stubborn refusal to compromise his righteousness, proving that he serves God for nothing (Job 27:2-6).
 - **B. Reaffirming Disinterested Righteousness:** Despite his errors, Job successfully demonstrates that his relationship with God is not transactional.
 - **C. Rejecting Compromise:** Had Job followed the transactional advice of his wife (to curse God and escape) or his friends (to falsely repent to get his stuff back), he would have forfeited his integrity and proved the Challenger right.
- **VI. Job's Self-Righteousness**
 - **A. The Problem of Pride:** Under Elihu's intense scrutiny, Job's confidence in his own righteousness is exposed as self-righteousness.
 - **B. Elevating Self Above God:** Job's self-righteousness becomes problematic because he is willing to denigrate God's justice and reputation to preserve his own moral standing.
 - **C. God's Rebuke:** Yahweh's speeches in chapter 40 confirm that Job was wrong to condemn God to justify himself.
- **VII. The Book's True Focus and Conclusion**

- **A. A Book About God:** The Book of Job is primarily about God and His sovereign policies, not about Job.
- **B. Job as a Human Foil:** Even an exceptionally righteous individual can respond poorly and make mistakes when his world falls apart.
- **C. Guiding Readers to Better Responses:** The book uses Job's flawed responses to teach readers how to think properly about God when things go wrong, replacing transactional equations with trust in divine wisdom.