

The Book of Job

Session 27: Theology of the Book of Job

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Abstract

In this session, Dr. John Walton distills the theology of the Book of Job by examining Job's flawed perceptions of God's character and policies. He refutes the common misconceptions that God is petty, unjust, or susceptible to human manipulation, explaining that the cosmos is ordered by divine wisdom rather than a simplistic system of retribution. Walton cautions that holding God to human standards of justice ultimately undermines His sovereignty, urging believers to align their thinking with a proper theology that values trust over transactional expectations.

Outline

I. Introduction

- A. Objective of the session: Distilling the overarching theology of the Book of Job.
- B. Methodological approach: Learning from Job's false views of God to piece together proper theology.

II. God is Not Petty

- A. Job's Suspect Over-Attentiveness
 - 1. Job is overly concerned with God's rewards and microscopic judgment (Job 7, 14).
 - 2. It is common today for suffering individuals to think God is over-exacting or holding onto decade-old lapses.
- B. Biblical Correction of Pettiness
 - 1. Matthew 5:48 commands perfection but does not imply God mercilessly accounts for minute deviations.
 - 2. Psalm 103 assures us that God knows human weaknesses and realizes our physical frailty.

III. God is Not Unjust

- A. Job's Accusations of Injustice
 - 1. Job's early affirmations of God's sovereignty (Job 1:21, 2:10) are temporary.
 - 2. He ultimately tries to call God to account, demanding a hearing in court and accusing Him of abusive power.

- 3. Job moves from questioning who can challenge God (Job 9:19) to asserting He destroys both the blameless and the wicked (Job 9:22).
- 4. Job claims God has withheld mishpat (justice) from him (Job 19:7, 27:2, 34:5).
- 5. He describes God as an assailant, opponent, betrayer, and pitiless warrior (Job 16:9-14).
- B. Divine Correction (Job 40:8)
 - 1. God rebukes Job for considering Him unjust to justify himself.
 - 2. Expecting justice in every daily circumstance inevitably leads to frustration and disappointment.
- C. The Flawed Cosmological Premise
 - 1. The mistake lies in assuming that the cosmos is stamped with the attributes of God or that His daily plan is to ensure justice.
 - 2. If God exercised power unguided by justice in a broken world, He would resemble a chaos creature.
 - 3. In a world with order, non-order, and disorder, justice cannot reign perfectly.
 - 4. God's design is a reflection of His wisdom, not contingent on human standards of justice; holding God accountable construes Him as less than God.

IV. God Cannot Be Manipulated

- A. Job's Attempt to Outmaneuver God
 - 1. Failing to engage God in court, Job deploys a formal oath of innocence (Job 31) to force God's hand.
 - 2. Job attempts to use God's silence to his benefit, seeking social coherence and vindication by challenging God to strike him dead.
 - 3. Job's initial behavior (Job 1:4-5) suggests he believed God could be managed or managed through ritual approaches.
- B. Modern Applications of Manipulation
 - 1. Believers today easily fall into the trap of thinking they can manipulate God through giving, church attendance, or rigid Christian disciplines.
 - 2. This is a flawed, benefits-oriented way of thinking that must not be tolerated.

V. Conclusion

- A. Correcting Misconceptions
 - 1. Recognizing Job's errors helps believers correct their own theological inclinations.
 - 2. A good theology of Job guards against thinking God is petty, unjust, or manageable.
- B. Transition to the Next Topic
 - 1. The theology of the book extends beyond the character of God to the theology of suffering, which is addressed in the subsequent session.