

## **Dr. John Walton, Job, Session 2, 6-min. Video Overview**

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When analyzing an Old Testament text, the absolute first step for scholars is establishing the exact date and the specific individual who wrote it. But applying those questions to the ancient Near East creates a massive analytical problem. In the ancient world, there were no books, and there were no authors.

To understand why, look at this diagram mapping how we think of intellectual property today. We link a solitary writer to a copyrighted idea, flowing directly into a mass-produced text. But the ancient Near East was a hearing-dominant culture.

Authority resided entirely in a speaking figure, funneling down to a specialized scribe. The authority belonged entirely to the voice. It did not belong to a writer or to the physical document itself.

Take a look at this cuneiform tablet. The rigid impressions and heavy clay material reveal its true function. It was not portable, and it was certainly not designed for mass readership.

What we call books today almost always began as isolated, individual documents, or scattered oral traditions, transmitted across centuries before ever being compiled. Projecting our modern framework of sole authorship onto these ancient cultures distorts our ability to see where the authority of a text truly lies. In the ancient Near East, illiteracy was the norm.

Society functioned perfectly because daily life required exactly zero reading or writing. People received their information through speech. A heard message carried immense legal and cultural weight, far more than a written record.

While a few people might learn the absolute basics of reading, actually drafting formal documents was restricted entirely to a highly specialized profession. This statue depicts one of those professionals, a scribe. They were the physical creators of documents, separate from the authority figures whose words they recorded.

Think of an ancient scribe like a modern lawyer. You only sought one out when you needed a highly serious, formal record drawn up. Look at the dense, utilitarian script on this papyrus fragment.

Documents like this weren't meant for public circulation. They went directly into closed archives. The public had zero access.

Only other scribes interacted with these texts, copying them strictly to preserve the record. Most Israelite narrative traditions, prophecies, and psalms existed in this fragmented archival state long before anyone thought to assemble them into unified collections. The Old Testament texts we categorize as books are the end-stage compilations of those ancient archives.

They preserve an authoritative, spoken voice from the past, rather than a single writer's creative genius. The Book of Job, however, defies this standard compilation process. It stands as a structural anomaly.

An older oral narrative about Job certainly existed, but the text we possess operates as a highly composed, unified piece of literature. The primary evidence lies in the extensive, multi-round speeches exchanged between Job and his friends. These aren't simple conversational replies.

The speeches feature incredibly sophisticated prose and interlocking poetic structures. This diagram illustrates the distinction. It's practically impossible for multiple people to extemporaneously generate this complex linguistic architecture in a heated debate.

The speeches respond to one another with exacting precision, designed from the start to operate as a single literary construct. Because Job is such a deliberate, unified text, we have to separate the historical events of the man's life from the much later process of the text's composition. This separation creates a paradox.

Scholars instinctively try to date the writing of the book to the era in which the man lived, but the text firmly resists that reflex. The narrative explicitly places Job in the land of Uz. He is a non-Israelite, living in a pre-Sinai, patriarchal era.

The text provides zero mention of a temple, the Sinai covenant, or Israelite law. Instead, we see Job acting as a patriarchal priest for his own family, a tribal norm that long predates formal Israelite religious structures. Furthermore, the text specifically references raiding parties from the Chaldeans and Sabeans, pointing to serious antiquity.

This chart maps indicators of the event era against markers of its composition. The events prove the subject was an early non-Israelite. But despite the ancient setting, the overarching literary structure reveals an orientation aimed squarely at a later Israelite audience.

This is the rule of chronological decoupling. The date of the historical events is entirely separate from the date of the sophisticated literary composition. We cannot find a modern author, and cannot use the historical events to date the composition.

The solution lies in how we classify the text. The Book of Job is wisdom literature. Watch as specific markers of time and place fade away.

Wisdom literature communicates enduring truths that apply universally. Because its truths are timeless, whether oral or written, early or late, Israelite or non-Israelite, it changes nothing about its core message. The authority of the Book of Job resides in its wisdom teaching.

It functions independently of its historical pedigree or origin story. Discarding the misguided search for a modern author allows us to finally focus on the text's true enduring purpose.