

Dr. John Walton, Job, Session 3, 6-min. Video Overview

BiblicalLearning.org by Ted Hildebrandt

Alright, let's dive straight into this explainer. Today, we're unpacking the Book of Job. Inspiration, authority, and the wisdom paradigm.

We're going to lean on some absolutely brilliant insights from Dr. John Walton to piece together what is, honestly, a giant literary puzzle. We're looking at how we actually read and understand this incredibly complex text, specifically by exploring the concepts of inspiration and authority. As you'll see, shifting our perspective on this ancient literature might just be the skeleton key that unlocks its deeper meaning.

So here is the massive problem we're trying to solve today. If much of what Job's friends, you know, characters like Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar, if what they say is objectively wrong, how in the world do we talk about this book as being true? Throughout the whole story, these guys are relentlessly insisting that Job's suffering has to be a direct punishment for some hidden secret sin. And the text flat out tells us that's completely false.

Yet, this is universally considered an authoritative text from God. It's a real head-scratcher, right? I mean, if the characters are actively speaking falsehoods, how does this come from a divine source? Well, to figure this out, we need to completely hit refresh on our understanding of two very common but incredibly misunderstood terms. First things first, we've got to strip away some baggage and redefine our terms.

When Dr. Walton talks about inspiration, he simply means the book has its source in God. It's God-breathed. But pay close attention to what it does not mean.

Inspiration does not mean God was literally acting as a whispering voice, magically planting wrong thoughts into the minds of Job's friends. Actually, scratch the whole divine ventriloquist idea entirely. We don't have to imagine God feeding bad theology to Eliphaz just so the guy has lines to say in the story.

Yes, the ultimate source and purpose of the book is God, but that doesn't mean he's literally dictating every single incorrect sentence spoken by the characters. And that naturally leads us right into authority. Because the text is inspired by God, it has the absolute right to speak.

It delivers reliable information that we can genuinely bank on as truth. And you know, the natural consequence of colliding with that kind of divine, reliable authority is that we have to submit to it. It demands a submissive response from us as readers, but the elephant in the room is still there, right? How exactly do we submit to a book where so much of the dialogue is demonstrably factually incorrect? How do we pan for that reliable gold hidden underneath all the bad theology of Job's friends? Okay, here comes a massive paradigm shift.

Think about this really carefully. The authority of the book of Job is not tied up in whether it is an exact, literal, perfect account of real events that happened in a real past. Its truth simply doesn't depend on its historicity.

Now, don't get me wrong. This isn't saying the narrative is automatically fake or that there wasn't a historical Job. Not at all.

It just means that this is simply not that kind of book. It's not trying to deliver its central truth through dry historical data. If you're looking for the reliable truth by treating this book like a daily newspaper report, you're going to totally miss the point.

To really wrap our heads around how this works, think about how Jesus used parables. He'd use these super realistic settings— farming, weddings, losing a coin under the couch— but he'd often weave in highly unusual elements to make the story punchy. He wasn't telling you about a historical event that definitively happened on a specific Tuesday afternoon in Galilee.

Parables run on deeper, wisdom-driven truth, not event-driven truth. And the Book of Job? It functions in the exact same way. It gives us a hyper-realistic depiction of human suffering paired with this incredibly unusual behind-the-scenes look at the heavenly courtroom.

It's affirming a wisdom teaching way, way more than it's affirming a historical event. Because this whole thing is wisdom-driven, the authority doesn't just automatically jump off the page as the events unfold. As careful readers, we have to totally upgrade how we engage with the text.

It's really a three-step process. Number one, we have to look past the narrative events themselves. Number two, we must actively identify the intentionally wrong-headed thinking on display.

And it is intentional. Most of the dialogue in the book is wrong-headed, and it's put there on purpose. By seeing the wrong way of thinking modeled so obviously, it gives us the contrast we need to see the right way.

And then number three, we carefully discern the underlying wisdom that the text is actually trying to affirm. So you really have to put your intelligent detective hat on for this. Why? Because the absolute most effective falsehood spoken by Job's friends, or even by the heavenly antagonist at the very beginning of the story, is rarely just obvious flat-out lies.

No, they are usually just a subtle, tiny shade off from the actual truth. I mean, sometimes the friends actually spit out solid theological truths, and sometimes the antagonist asks totally valid questions. But it's those falsehoods that sound exactly like the truth that are the most dangerous.

That is exactly why the authority of the book is found in the big ideas it presents, and the deeper truth that transcends all that immediate messy back-and-forth dialogue. But here's the thing. As we try to extract this deeper wisdom message, we hit a total roadblock.

We usually come to scripture expecting it to be this intimate all-access biography of God's inner thoughts. We want the why. Why does God allow suffering? Why does he do what he does in any given situation? We want the insider scoop on his complex reasoning.

But we kind of have to check ourselves and remember, he is God, and we are most definitely not. His ways are simply not our ways. The revelation we actually get in this book is much more about how God operates in the world and how he doesn't operate, which frankly leaves a ton of mystery about his inherent nature.

And this totally frames our understanding of revelation. Dr. Walton puts it perfectly. He says, The more we get to thinking that God is fully known by us is the extent to which we have made him in our own image.

That's a mic drop right there. We have to embrace the fact that there are strict, hard limits on the knowledge of God that we can achieve as human beings. If we go into the book of Job expecting a neat, tidy, bullet-pointed list explaining God's exact psychological motivations, we're going to be severely disappointed.

Or worse, we're probably just inventing a comfortable version of God that looks and thinks exactly like us. So how in the world should we view this revelation then? Well, Dr. Walton gives us this brilliant analogy. Don't think of the Bible as an all-access backstage pass to God's inner mind.

Instead, think of it like a classroom syllabus. Think about it. When a professor hands you a syllabus on day one, they are laying out their plans for the course, their overall purposes, and exactly how they expect you, the student, to participate.

Sure, the syllabus might give you a tiny glimpse into the professor's personality, but that's not what it's for. Its job is to guide you. In the exact same way, God uses the Bible to reveal his kingdom plans, his purposes, and the specific role we get to play as active partners in his work.

He gives us exactly enough information to participate. Which brings us full circle right back to authority. Once we identify this syllabus and we uncover its authoritative wisdom message, we don't have the luxury of just picking and choosing what we want to follow.

It's just like how we don't have the freedom to call up the IRS and tell them which parts of our taxes we feel like paying today, unfortunately. We are completely under authority when it comes to the inspired text. Once we roll up our sleeves, look past the events, sift through the wrongheaded thinking, and find what the Book of Job is actually affirming, we are entirely obligated to submit to that message.

To wrap up this explainer, I want to leave you with one final, really provocative thought. The Book of Job isn't just some dusty old story about a guy having a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day. It's a profound, wisdom-driven syllabus designed to show us our place in the universe and exactly how God does and doesn't work.

It demands that you look deeply, way beyond the surface of the events, to find the real truth. So, the ultimate question isn't whether you've suddenly figured out every single

mystery of God's mind. The question is, now that you've seen the syllabus and you know your role as a partner in his plans, are you going to show up and participate in the course?