

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

BiblicalLearning.org by Ted Hildebrandt

Welcome back to the Explainer. Today, we're unpacking what is quite literally one of the oldest, most intense courtroom dramas ever recorded in human history. We are looking at the ancient text of the Book of Job, but we're doing it through the incredibly sharp lens of biblical scholar Dr. John Walton.

Now, if you think you know this story, I need you to wipe the slate completely clean. This isn't just some ancient poem. It's a full-blown trial.

But as we're going to see, the defendant on the stand? Yeah, it's probably not who you think it is. Why do good people suffer? I mean, it's the ultimate universal question, right? It's the riddle that has kept philosophers, theologians, and, well, everyday people like us awake at night for thousands of years. And for the longest time, the vast majority of us have just assumed the Book of Job is a simple story meant to answer this exact question, like a direct explanation for why bad things happen to the good guys.

But Dr. Walton's research reveals that reading the text this way actually misses the entire point of the book. Okay, let's dive into this, because here is Dr. Walton's massive paradigm shift. It's not about Job.

It's about God's policies. Think about that for a second. This completely flips how we read and understand this text.

The entire purpose of the book is not to give us some neat, tidy answer to human suffering. The real purpose, according to Walton, is to help us learn how to think well, how to think properly and appropriately about God when disaster inevitably strikes. It's a deep exploration of how the universe is actually run.

And this clears up the biggest misunderstanding right out of the gate. See, we tend to think Job is the one on trial here. God and the devil are making some cosmic bet to see if Job is going to crack under pressure.

But the reality? It's God's policies that are on trial. The narrative is actually the sweeping, cosmic litigation questioning how God works in the world. It's an evaluation of the rules governing the universe.

So we're not testing one man's personal righteousness. We are literally cross-examining the policies of the creator. So to really understand this trial, we need to meet the prosecutors.

The book sets up two major accusations, driven at God from completely opposite directions. Enter prosecutor number one, the challenger. In the text, this is the adversary in the heavenly court, sometimes called the satan.

But stepping into this courtroom today, we need to view him strictly as a highly logical, incredibly sharp prosecuting attorney. He is stepping right up to the bench to point out what

he sees as a massive flaw in how God runs the universe. The challenger stands before God and delivers this incredibly probing question.

Does Job serve God for nothing? Now, on the surface, okay, it sounds like he's just questioning Job's personal motivations. But Dr. Walton points out that inherent in this question is a fundamental attack on God's policy itself. The challenger is really asking, God, is it actually a good policy for you to bring prosperity to righteous people? Because God had been blessing Job for being a good guy, and the challenger is calling that entire system into question.

To really grasp the challenger's brilliant logic here, think about what a mercenary is. A mercenary is a person who serves merely for wages or some ulterior motive. The challenger's argument is devastatingly simple, and honestly, kind of hard to argue with.

If God constantly pays people to be good, if he always rewards righteousness with health, wealth, and success, then God is actually training humanity to be mercenaries. Give out enough benefits, and people stop caring about being genuinely good. They just care about the payout.

And this brilliantly illustrates the dark side of what seems like a perfect system, right? If righteousness automatically brings prosperity, well, people begin longing for the benefits rather than the virtue itself. And ultimately, true goodness is completely subverted. So, the challenger is basically telling God, look, your policy of rewarding good behavior, it's terrible.

It corrupts human motivation. You aren't creating righteous people. You're just creating people who know how to play the system to get rich.

It's a powerful, highly logical accusation against God's governance. But the trial doesn't end there. God allows the challenger to test this theory by completely removing Job's wealth, his health, and his family.

And then, a second prosecutor takes the stand. This prosecutor is Job himself. Sitting in the literal ashes of his ruined existence, scraping boils off his skin after absolute, unimaginable disaster has struck his life, Job brings his own fierce accusation against the policies of the Almighty.

And Job's defense is just highly relatable. He argues that it is unjust for righteous people to suffer. Job is essentially saying, God, we are the good guys.

We're on your team. We followed the rules. We did the right things.

And yet, here we are, completely crushed and broken. Why do we suffer? This is a terrible policy. Job is challenging God from the exact opposite angle of the first prosecutor.

He's arguing that allowing the righteous to experience calamity is a fundamental failure of divine justice. So, the crucial point here is the impossible, logical trap these two compelling accusations create. On one side, you have the challenger's rule.

Do not reward the righteous, because if you do, it turns them into greedy mercenaries and subverts true goodness. But on the other side, you have Job's rule. Do not punish or allow

suffering for the righteous, because doing so is deeply unjust and betrays the very people who are on your side.

I just want to pause for a second and let you soak in the weight of this massive paradox. Because it is the ultimate cosmic catch-22. What is a God to do? Seriously, if rewarding the righteous corrupts their motives, but allowing the righteous to suffer violates justice, how is the creator of the universe supposed to act? What is an appropriate policy here? The book of Job masterfully boxes God into this incredible philosophical corner just to force us to think deeply about how the world actually works.

The answer to resolving at least the first part of this dilemma is pretty stark. As Dr. Walton notes, the challenger was actually right about one thing. As long as Job had everything, nobody really knew his true motives.

The only true test was to remove the benefits. The logical way to uncover the true metal of Job's righteousness, completely free from any of those mercenary motives we talked about, was to strip the prosperity away. Removing the benefits wasn't some cruel game.

It was literally the only diagnostic tool available to prove that true, disinterested righteousness could actually exist in a human being. Let's move to the end and see how this all builds to the dramatic resolution of the book, the verdict. After chapters and chapters of Job and his friends arguing, debating, and demanding answers, God finally breaks his silence.

He steps into the whirlwind to address the court and deliver the verdict. But how he responds is where so many readers get it wrong, and it's exactly where Dr. Walton's insights are absolutely vital for us to understand what's really happening. Let's dismantle a massive misconception right now.

When God finally speaks, he talks about the cosmos, the oceans, the stars, the wild animals. And many people read this and assume God is just playing the power card. Basically saying, look, I'm God, you're not, I can do whatever I want, so shut up.

But Dr. Walton argues passionately that this completely misses the mark. God doesn't pull rank to silence Job. Instead, he plays the trust card.

He is laying out the sheer mind-boggling complexity of the universe, not to belittle Job, but to show him a card of profound compassion. Dr. Walton powerfully distills God's final response to Job like this. I am God who is supremely wise and powerful.

Trust me, even when you don't understand. Think about that. God doesn't actually answer the specific why of Job's suffering.

He doesn't hand him a detailed theological flowchart. Instead, God reveals his supreme wisdom in managing a universe that is just far too complex for any human mind to comprehend. The ultimate goal of the book, the whole purpose of exploring these divine policies, is to invite us to view God as entirely trustworthy and reliable, especially during our most desperate times.

Which brings us to the ultimate question this ancient text demands of every single one of us. How will you view God when your own disasters strike? Because let's be honest, they will. Job wasn't on trial.

The policies of the universe were. And the verdict is that those policies are managed by a wisdom we simply cannot fathom, but a wisdom we are invited to trust. So when the benefits are stripped away, and you can no longer be a mercenary, and when you feel the absolute injustice of suffering, will you demand the power card or will you accept the trust card? Will you trust the universe's policies when your own world falls apart? Keep seeking the truth behind the text.

And thanks for joining me on this explainer.