

Dr. John Walton, Job, Session 7, 6-min. Video Overview

BiblicalLearning.org by Ted Hildebrandt

Welcome to the Explainer. Today we're unpacking something absolutely fascinating. Dr. John Walton's profound breakdown of the Book of Job.

If you've ever felt like this ancient text is just, well, a confusing labyrinth of suffering and dense arguments, you are definitely not alone. But Dr. Walton has this brilliant way of structuring the core conflict of the book, using a geometric concept that makes the whole shebang just click right into place. So let's explore this together and see if we can rethink some of our deepest assumptions about exactly how the world works.

I mean, think about it. Have you ever experienced a major setback or honestly just stubbed your toe on a terrible morning and immediately found yourself asking, what did I do to deserve this? Or actually, maybe the exact opposite. You get a great promotion and think, hey, I must have done something right.

It's totally human nature. We have this deeply ingrained assumption that we get exactly what we deserve in life. We assume there's a neat one-to-one cosmic payout for our actions.

And that very assumption- that is exactly what the book of Job puts directly under the microscope. Okay, here's our roadmap for today. We're going to cover the retribution principle, the triangle of claims, choosing corners and Job, Elihu's clever loophole, theodicy versus theology, and finally, the shift from cause to purpose.

Let's jump right in. Section one, the retribution principle, systematizing God. This ancient concept is literally the foundational problem at the very heart of the book of Job.

Understanding this is absolutely crucial to understanding everything else that happens to our main character. So the retribution principle is basically the idea that the righteous will prosper and the wicked will suffer. People get what they deserve.

It's our attempt to systematize how God works. You know, you do good, you get good. You do bad, bad things happen.

But Dr. Walton points out a massive issue raised early in the book by the challenger. The challenger argues that if God always rewards righteousness with prosperity, well, it creates an ulterior motive. Are people actually being righteous, or are they just acting good for the anticipated payoff? It asks the big question: does Job serve God for nothing? Section two, the triangle of claims, a geometric trap.

To really see how this principle traps the characters in Job, Dr. Walton introduces this literal geometric trap. Imagine a triangle with these three claims at the corners. God is just, Job is righteous, and the retribution principle is true.

Now, while Job was at the highest heights of humanity, prospering with his family and his wealth, all three of these points coexisted beautifully. It was very comfortable, right? But the second Job is plunged into the lowest depths of tragedy, this geometry completely shatters. You just cannot hold on to all three corners in the face of his massive suffering.

One of these three corners must be abandoned. Something has got to give. Section three, choosing corners in Job.

Where is your fort? When the pressure is on, it's fascinating to see exactly where everyone builds their theological forts to defend their worldview. Job's friends build their fort right in the retribution principle corner. Since they absolutely refuse to abandon the idea that God is just, they have to abandon that third corner, Job.

To them, Job must have some kind of secret sin. They blame him to protect their neat, orderly view of the universe. Job, on the other hand, built his fort in his own righteousness.

He knows he's innocent, but he also fiercely holds on to the retribution principle. So what corner does he abandon? Tragically, Job begins to look up and accuse God of injustice. He gives up on God's justice entirely.

Section four, Elihu's clever loophole, redefining the terms. Eventually, a fourth character enters the dialogue, and he attempts to navigate this deadly triangle with a pretty clever cheat. He redefines the retribution principle.

The traditional friends saw retribution as remedial, meaning something bad you did in the past is causing your suffering now. But Elihu argues that retribution can be preventative. He basically tells Job, look, your problem isn't what you did before the suffering.

Your problem is evident right now in your self-righteousness and your willingness to accuse God. He attacks Job's present arrogance rather than digging around for past sins. It's a bit closer to the truth for sure, but Elihu is still fundamentally leaning on a modified version of the retribution principle to explain everything.

Section five, theodicy versus theology, escaping the trap. To actually escape this trap entirely, we need to step back and draw a hard line between these two concepts. Theodicy is our very human attempt to explain why they're suffering in evil.

We want a cause. We want to philosophically defend God's actions on a moment-by-moment basis. Theology, however, is simply understanding the character and identity of God.

We're seeking a relationship. Dr. Walton makes a really powerful point here. Our attempts at theodicy are often kind of an insult to God.

God doesn't need our defense. I mean, we aren't exactly in a position to defend him anyway. He wants to be trusted based on his character, not constantly cross-examined for his reasons.

So if the retribution principle isn't a rock-solid guarantee, what is it? Well, it's proverbial. It's how things often work, not how they always work. God operates with an entire constellation of attributes: mercy, compassion, grace, not just strict immediate justice.

Dr. Walton reminds us that if God applied perfect instantaneous justice in a fallen world, it would destroy us all. Literally, none of us would survive it. The retribution principle tells us about God's heart for justice, but it was never, ever meant to be a mathematical formula for diagnosing human suffering.

Section six, cause to purpose, the shift. Now, this builds incredibly into the New Testament to permanently shatter that triangle of claims. Look at this interaction in John chapter nine.

The disciples see a man born blind, and they immediately throw out a theodicy question. Who sinned, this man or his parents? They want a cause, right? They're applying the retribution principle, but Jesus radically pivots. He straight up refuses to give them a cause.

He says neither, but that the works of God might be displayed. Jesus does the exact same thing in Luke 13 when a tower falls on a crowd of people. He refuses to say it was a one-to-one punishment for their sins.

Jesus consistently turns our attention away from the past and away from finding a cause and redirects us entirely toward the future, looking for God's purpose. And that brings us to the ultimate takeaway of this explainer. Think about your own life, your own hurdles, your own suffering.

Dr. Walton shows us that the book of Job performs radical surgery on our worldview. We aren't meant to figure out the why. No explanation is forthcoming, and frankly, none is necessary.

So how would shifting your focus from why did this happen to me to what is the purpose in this completely change the way you face your own circumstances? When we abandon the retribution triangle and stop demanding a cause, we finally open ourselves up to simply trusting God's wisdom and seeking his purpose. Definitely something to think about the next time life doesn't go exactly the way you planned.