

Dr. John Walton, Job, Session 8, 6-min. Video Overview

BiblicaleLearning.org by Ted Hildebrandt

Welcome to This Explainer. Today, we're diving right into the first five verses of the book of Job to uncover a truly fascinating mystery that's literally been hiding in plain sight. I mean, most of us know the basic setup, right? Job is the ultimate righteous sufferer.

But what if we've been reading his introduction completely wrong this whole time? Let's get into it. So let's start with a pretty provocative thought. What if Job's opening scene isn't just setting up this perfectly flawless guy, but is actually dropping massive clues about a critical weakness?

Usually when we read these opening lines, we just see this gold star resume of human perfection. We're told he's blameless, wildly successful, incredibly devout, the whole shebang. But as we dig into the ancient context, specifically leaning on some brilliant analysis by Dr. John Walton, we're going to see that this so-called perfection, well, it might actually be deeply flawed theology.

And it's a flaw that essentially sets the stage for everything that follows. All right, section one, the mysterious land of Uz, an outsider's perspective. To really understand Job, we have to look at his origins because in this text, geography is theology.

Job is from Uz. Now for the original ancient Israelite audience, Uz was this obscure kind of mysterious place way out on the perimeter of the known world. And because of this, Job doesn't actually worship Yahweh, the covenant God of Israel.

Instead, he fears Elohim, which is a much more general term for God. By setting Job up as a foreigner with general rather than insider knowledge of the divine, the text is flashing a massive neon sign at us. It's saying, hey, we aren't just dealing with a strictly Israelite problem here.

We're tackling universal human questions about suffering. Moving on to section two, painted in absolute extremes, the ideal character and wealth. So we've got this outsider, but pay attention to how the text actually describes him.

We get our first linguistic clue with the Hebrew word *tom*. Now this gets translated as blameless, but it doesn't mean divine, sinless perfection. What it means is that Job is a man of absolutely unmatched internal integrity.

There's no hidden guilt, no skeletons in his closet. He is completely internally sound. And backing that up is another Hebrew word *yashar*, which translates to upright.

This tells us his outward actions were equally flawless. He behaves exactly 100% according to God's expectations. Think about it.

If you wanted to describe a guilty or wicked person standing under condemnation, you'd use the exact opposites of *tom* and *yashar*. The crucial point here is that Job is literally the

absolute best a human being can possibly be both inside and out. And this total perfection, it extends to his physical life as well.

His wealth and status are cranked up to the absolute maximum. We're talking a complete 100% ideal of ancient prosperity: immense flocks, thousands of camels, sheep, cattle. He hasn't just done well for himself.

He's achieved success by the highest possible standards of the ancient world. Now you might be thinking, come on, this is just ancient exaggeration, right? Well, not exactly. As Dr. Walton points out, these extremes aren't just simple hyperbole.

They're actually absolutely crucial narrative devices. Their job is to completely eliminate any easy explanations for the horrific suffering Job is about to endure. Think about it.

If Job's character was only, you know, pretty good, we might just say his suffering was a punishment for some secret sins. Or if his wealth was only average, we might chalk his losses up to a run of bad luck or normal economic downturn. By painting everything in absolute 100% extremes, the author purposefully forces all those easy answers right off the table.

Let's look at section three, blessing, cursing, and euphemisms, unlocking the linguistic code. Okay, so this perfect outsider has a really intriguing and honestly highly anxious routine of ritual piety. The text describes the cycle where his sons hold these lavish family banquets, but the second the feasting ends, Job rushes out early in the morning to sacrifice burnt offerings for every single one of his children just in case they accidentally sinned in their hearts during the party.

Ironically enough, this very banquet setting is exactly where his kids will eventually meet their demise. But look closely at the language Job uses to describe his fear. The text literally says he worried they might have blessed God in their hearts.

Now that's a fascinating euphemism. You see, ancient writers thought that putting the word curse right next to the word God was an incredibly bad taste, so they swapped in the word bless. And this brilliantly sets up a massive literary motif that runs through the whole book.

God literally blesses Job. The challenger says Job will bless, meaning curse, God to his face, and later Job's wife tells him to bless God and die. It's this clever linguistic easter egg that frames the entire cosmic conflict.

But what did Job actually fear his kids were doing? I mean, what does cursing God really entail in this ancient context? It isn't just muttering a bad word. It meant using frivolous oaths, pronouncing hexes, or speaking in a contemptuous, slanderous way. But most importantly, it meant treating God as someone who is powerless, corrupt, or manipulable.

Cursing God is essentially stripping God of his rightful honor and treating him as petty. And that realization brings us directly to the core of Job's profound anxiety. Which brings us to section four, the chink in the armor, a fatal theological flaw.

To really grasp what's happening inside Job's head, we actually need to look outside the Bible for a second. Job's protective rituals peel back a layer to reveal a really deep flaw in his

worldview. Have you ever been around someone where you feel like you're constantly walking on eggshells, just terrified that one wrong move will completely set them off? Well, Job feels exactly that way about the divine.

His anxiety perfectly mirrors an ancient Assyrian text known as the prayer to every God. In that text, a terrified worshiper says, if I have inadvertently stepped on a place that's holy or pronounced a word that is offensive to my God or to a bad that I don't know, the worshiper essentially runs through this exhausting checklist of accidental offenses, totally terrified of deities who are just waiting around to trip him up. And right here is the grand revelation, the hidden flaw we've been building toward this whole time.

Job's ritual piety, sacrificing just in case his kids had a stray, unguarded thought at a party, shows that he fundamentally views God through the exact same lens as that Assyrian worshiper. Job views God as a petty deity who is easily offended and constantly demands appeasement. It's a totally transactional mindset.

If I do the right rituals, God owes me a blessing. If I slip up, God's going to strike me. He's entirely focused on appeasement, not necessarily true, unmotivated righteousness.

And this is the exact weakness, the precise chink in his so-called perfect armor that the challenger is going to ruthlessly exploit when the scene shifts to heaven. The challenger is basically going to look at God and say, well, of course he acts perfectly. He thinks he's paying you off for protection.

So where does that leave us? It leaves us with an incredibly profound question to ponder, and not just for Job, but for ourselves. As we look at the rest of this story, we have to ask, is true faith really about genuine righteousness and a relationship built on absolute trust? Or are we deep down just trying to perform all the right rituals to appease an easily offended deity? It completely changes how you read the rest of the book, doesn't it? Thanks so much for joining me on this explainer, and I highly encourage you to keep questioning the text.