

Dr. John Walton, Job, Session 15, 6-min. Video Overview

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Alright, let's jump right into this explainer. We're going to look at one of the most famous, and honestly, probably one of the most wildly misunderstood verses in all of ancient literature. We're diving straight into the Book of Job, relying on some absolutely brilliant scholarship by Dr. John Walton to demystify a fascinating character known simply as the Redeemer.

Now, I bet you recognize those majestic words. They're totally immortalized in Handel's musical masterpiece, The Messiah. And because of that massive cultural footprint, when most of us read this verse today, especially when we see that capitalized R on Redeemer, we instantly assume Job is talking about Jesus.

We think he's looking forward to a savior for his soul. But if we want to get to the bottom of this ancient text, we really have to pause and ask some tough questions. Well, here's a simple linguistic fact that kind of changes everything.

Ancient Hebrew didn't actually have capital letters. That means the capital R in Redeemer isn't in the original text at all. It's a much later theological interpretation, not a direct, literal translation.

So to figure out what Job actually meant in his own time, we can't exactly use an 18th-century piece of music as our guide. Part 1 – The Ancient Hebrew Goel – Defining the Crime Scene. To really solve this mystery, we've got to strip away our modern assumptions completely and travel back to the gritty reality of ancient Hebrew society. We need to look at the exact Hebrew word being used here, which is Goel.

Now, it gets translated as Redeemer, but it actually refers to a highly specific legal role. A Goel was a legal advocate or a family defender. Their entire function was to step into a messy legal situation to right a wrong done to a person.

So Job isn't sitting out there looking for a spiritual savior to forgive his sins. Not at all. He is fiercely demanding a gritty, hard-hitting legal advocate to defend his innocence against his friends' false accusations.

Basically, the guy needs a really good lawyer. And this brings us to a massive problem in the story. If Job is seeking a legal advocate, a Goel, to step into the courtroom and clear his name, who on earth can he possibly hire? I mean, at this point in the narrative, Job has lost absolutely everything.

His wealth, his health, his entire standing in society. He's got nothing left. Part 2. The Lineup of Suspects. So, we can systematically eliminate the earthly suspects here.

Some scholars, like Dr. D.J. Clines, suggest Job's own cry of innocence is sort of personified as the advocate. But, you know, that's a bit abstract. Just a voice without physical sound.

What about God? Well, actually, scratch that, because that's a massive conflict of interest. God is the one Job is accusing of treating him unjustly in the first place, and a mediator can't be the accused. How about human relatives? Traditionally, a Goel was a family member.

But all of Job's have completely deserted him. And what about the later character Elihu? He steps up to speak, sure, but he's got the totally wrong motive. He wants to justify God, not vindicate Job.

So, with all the earthly options completely exhausted, where does Job turn? According to Dr. John Walton's analysis, the prime suspect is actually someone not from earth at all. Job is looking upward. He's desperately hoping for an advocate from the membership of the Divine Council.

You know, that heavenly realm where these massive cosmic decisions are actually being made. And this right here brilliantly illustrates a tragic, almost painful irony in the text. Job's friends actually discuss this heavenly mediator as a theoretical possibility.

Eliphaz dismisses it as a total long shot, while Elihu brings it up later as a valid option. But here is the truly heartbreaking part. A heavenly challenger from this exact Divine Council is the one who came before God and started Job's suffering back in chapter 1. But Job doesn't know this.

He's just sitting there in the ashes, desperately hoping another heavenly advocate will step up to the mic to end his nightmare. Part 3. Seeing God in the Flesh – The Gruesome Reality. Okay, let's pivot to the second half of Job's famous quote. It moves from this high-stakes courtroom drama down to some incredibly visceral, raw, physical imagery.

We just had, I know my Redeemer lives. The very next line is, After my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God. Now, when a lot of modern readers see this, they picture a beautiful, spiritual, heavenly afterlife, right? The body decays, but the soul goes on to see God.

But Dr. Walton points out that the Old Testament actually offers zero theological support for that kind of resurrection expectation at this specific point in history. So, what is Job actually saying? Well, we really have three interpretive options to look at. Option one, a literal resurrection.

As we just noted, that lacks Old Testament support. Option two, posthumous vindication, meaning Job's name is cleared after he's dead. But that doesn't fit Job's urgent demand to see it happen himself.

So, ruling out those first two leaves us with Walton's interpretation: Job is expecting a desperate last-minute reprieve right there in the dirt. We absolutely have to take Job's words literally here. The phrase, after my skin has been destroyed, isn't some poetic metaphor for the natural decay of the grave.

It's a gruesome, current reality. Job is sitting on a literal ash heap, scraping his own diseased skin off his body with a piece of broken pottery, a pot sherd. He's essentially saying, even after I scrape all this diseased skin away, yet in my flesh, I will see God.

What this elegantly translates to is this: in my flesh simply means before I die, period. And seeing God isn't about getting a golden ticket to heaven. In ancient Near Eastern terms, it means being restored to God's favor, no longer being an outcast.

Job firmly, emphatically believes his heavenly advocate will arrive right there at the dung heap, proving his innocence and restoring his relationship with God before his physical body completely gives out from the disease. Part four, the final verdict: vindication versus forgiveness. So this deep dive into the ancient context brings us full circle to exactly why forcing Jesus into the role of Job's Goel actually breaks the profound message of the entire book.

Let's just compare these two roles side by side. It's like apples and oranges. Job's Goel is all about vindication.

This advocate writes a wrong done to a person, proves the person is completely innocent, and demands justice for unfair suffering. Now look at Jesus's role in Christian theology. It's about forgiveness and justification.

Jesus writes a wrong done by a person, takes the punishment for their committed offenses, and offers salvation from sin. Job doesn't want someone to take the punishment for his sins. He emphatically wants an advocate to declare that he has committed no sins to deserve this suffering.

And listen, this is the crux of the whole book of Job right here. If Job were to seek a savior for forgiveness, he'd be validating his friend's false accusations. His friends have been saying all along, Job, you must have sinned to deserve this pain; just confess.

If Job asks for forgiveness, the game is lost. He destroys his entire argument. He insists he is innocent, and he wants a lawyer to prove it.

Dr. Walton also points out a pretty wild fact. Not a single New Testament author connects Jesus to Job 19. While Jesus is presented as the ultimate answer to the overall brokenness and sin of the world, making him Job's specific Goel in this chapter acts as a huge distorting factor.

It totally mutes Job's powerful, agonizing plea. Forcing a later theological lens onto this verse completely obscures Job's ancient, defiant hope for justice in the face of the inexplicable. And that leaves us with a truly challenging thought to wrap up on.

Stripping away the centuries of added interpretation gives us back the raw, unfiltered book of Job. It shows us a man in absolute agony who flat out refuses to just roll over and accept blame for a tragedy he didn't cause. So if Job's cry wasn't for a savior of his soul, but a lawyer for his pain, how does that reframe the way we view our own moments of unjust suffering? It suggests that sometimes profound faith isn't about quietly accepting punishment or reciting empty platitudes.

Sometimes true faith looks exactly like Job, sitting right there in the ashes, boldly demanding an advocate, and fiercely holding onto your integrity in the dark.