

Dr. John Walton, Job, Session 17, 6-min. Video Overview

BiblicaleLearning.org by Ted Hildebrandt

Welcome back to The Explainer. Today, we're diving into Job 28 and unpacking a massive cosmic paradigm shift. Let's jump right in and unpack Dr. John Walton's fascinating breakdown of a truly pivotal moment in the book of Job.

If you think this story is just some simple morality tale about a guy who lost everything, well, get ready. Chapter 28 is about to completely upend that. It zooms way out from this human courtroom drama to reveal the foundational operating system of the entire universe.

But we've got to start by asking an existential question that, let's be honest, we've all desperately wrestled with at some point. What happens when doing everything exactly right still leads to absolute suffering? Job knows he's innocent. He hasn't been seduced by the easy out of just admitting guilt to get his old life back.

He looks around at his ruined world and essentially concludes, man, this system is completely broken. You see, that system they were relying on actually has a name. It's called the retribution principle.

Basically, it's the operating theory that the righteous will naturally prosper and the wicked will inevitably suffer. Job's friends absolutely operated on this specific theological equation. They treated it like a cosmic vending machine, right? Put in good deeds, get out blessings.

Put in bad deeds, get out suffering. Simple. But Job's flat-out refusal to admit to hidden sins kind of threw a wrench in the whole thing.

It proved this system is fundamentally broken, or at the very least, it's just not the ultimate rule governing reality. And this brilliantly illustrates the resolution of the first major conflict in the book. Remember the challenger from the very beginning? His entire claim was that God's policy of rewarding righteous people was basically just a bribe.

He was saying nobody serves God for nothing. But Job actually demonstrated what Dr. Walton calls disinterested righteousness. Because Job held on to his integrity even when literally all the rewards were stripped away, he forced this entire cosmic courtroom drama to a complete standstill.

He proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that he wasn't just being righteous to get a paycheck. The challenger's case? Totally dismissed. And his friends, the ones representing that purely transactional viewpoint? They were completely silenced.

So suddenly chapter 28 acts as this really unexpected intermission. We transition away from the heavy dialogue, and the narrator actually steps in with this beautiful poem about mining. Yeah, mining.

The text highlights how incredibly ingenious humans are. I mean, we can dig deep into the earth, follow these tiny veins of silver and gold, and bring hidden precious things right out into the daylight. But then the narrator makes this profound pivot.

As incredibly good as we are at mining for physical treasure, true wisdom is entirely inaccessible to human ingenuity alone. You can't dig for it. You can't buy it.

It is entirely 100% beyond human effort. So here is the brilliant paradigm shift. Humans naturally demand an operating system based on a strict scale of justice, that retribution principle we just talked about.

Job and his friends thought they knew exactly how the cosmos was ordered. But actually, scratch that. God ordered the universe using an entirely different operating system: profound wisdom.

Wisdom, at least in the biblical sense, is found in the deep, incredibly complex ordering of the components of the cosmos. It's like a giant puzzle. It's not just about what's fair right now, in the moment.

It's about the grand overarching design. This completely upends the friend's logic. Job chapter 28 verse 27 tells us that God looked at wisdom; he appraised it, confirmed it, and tested it.

Think about that for a second. He approved creation by the criterion of wisdom, not justice. Job's friends tried so hard to make justice the absolute foundation of order in the cosmos.

But God completely turns that on its head. True order isn't found in a simple transaction of good deeds for good rewards. The equation Job and his friends were using was just wildly inadequate to explain the deep complexities of the real world.

Now this shift builds even further when we look at the actual language being used. It's a really fascinating detail in the text. Job 28.28 gives an instruction directly to humankind, and God himself speaks using the Hebrew word Adonai.

Now this is absolutely crucial because it's the only occurrence of Adonai in the entire book of Job. They don't use Yahweh, they don't use Elohim, or Shaddai here. Adonai has this very distinct sense of Lord or Master.

It fundamentally redefines our relationship with the Creator by drawing out the necessary element of submission to authority. It's basically telling us that the path to true wisdom begins by submitting to the Master. The verse tells us that the fear of Adonai is wisdom.

But what does that actually mean in practice? Well, fearing God means we never ever treat him as detached or as something that can just be ignored. We don't view him as incompetent, limited, or impotent. Job's friends practically tried to advise God.

But fearing him means recognizing he's definitely not short-sighted. He isn't petty, and he isn't corrupt. Fearing God is not about feeling this blind, shaking terror.

It's about taking him seriously. It means recognizing that he is the complete opposite of these flawed, limited human traits that we instinctively try to project onto the universe. And we really have to realize there is only one true source here.

Dr. Walton makes a brilliant point, saying God is merely wise actually completely understates his nature. If we just say God is wise, it kind of makes it sound like there's some outside universal standard of wisdom that God is just doing a really good job of measuring up to. But no way.

God is the source, the very definition of wisdom; the very foundation of any order or coherence we see in the cosmos is founded entirely in him. The poem isn't just saying God has wisdom. It's pointing to him as the absolute author of the whole shebang.

So this beautiful intermission of chapter 28 serves a massive rhetorical purpose. It really acts as a three-step pivot for the whole book. First, it mechanically transitions us from those endless circular dialogues to the upcoming discourses.

Second, we are completely leaving behind the challenger's initial contention about whether righteous people should be prosperous and moving to Job's new challenge. Is it actually good policy for righteous people to suffer? And third, it pivots the entire text away from a failed, frustrating search for strict justice and points us directly toward an understanding of the profound source of wisdom. And that brings us to the ultimate challenge of this explainer and really the core of the entire second half of Job.

If the retribution principle is broken, if the cosmic vending machine of justice doesn't actually work the way we all thought it did, how do we find coherence and meaning when innocent people experience terrible tragedy? Job's friend's advice definitely wouldn't have brought any coherence to Job's shattered world. It just brought him more guilt and shame. So where on earth do we find order when the world feels entirely disordered? Well, the answer lies in how we practically apply that fear of Adonai.

And we do that by expressing it as trust. We actually express our fear of the Lord when we trust him without needing a full, itemized explanation or receipt for why things are happening. We trust his unassailable, perfectly just nature, even when we can't identify a shred of justice in our current circumstances.

We trust that his cosmic operating system is set up in the absolute wisest possible way, even when we are suffering the confusing, painful consequences of a world that is broken by the fall. We trust his love, period. So, I'm going to leave you with this final thought to ponder as we wrap up Dr. Walton's profound insights on Job 28.

Job wasn't in control. And you know what? Neither are we. Our human expectations shouldn't dictate how the universe proceeds.

So when your human expectations of a perfectly fair, transactional justice system inevitably fail, will you have the true wisdom to submit, to let go of your desperate need for an explanation, and to simply trust the ultimate source?