

Dr. John Walton, Job, Session 23, 6-min. Video Overview

BiblicalLearning.org by Ted Hildebrandt

Alright, let's jump right in. In this explainer, we are going on a bit of a theological detective hunt. We're investigating one of the most notoriously difficult, heavily debated, and frankly, totally confusing conclusions in all of ancient literature.

We're talking about the final chapter of the Book of Job. If you've read it, you know the setup, right? Job suffers absolutely terribly; he argues back and forth with his friends; God finally speaks out of a whirlwind; and then, well, then we hit the epilogue. Today, we're going to systematically break down the brilliant insights of Dr. John Walton, who really helps us decode what is actually happening in those final, confusing verses.

Because, I mean, let's be totally honest here. We really have to ask, does the end of Job kind of ring hollow to you? For centuries, readers have felt this deep, unsettling unease with how it wraps up. Think about it.

Job gets his wealth doubled, and he gets a new set of children. But giving someone new children doesn't just magically erase the devastating grief of losing the first ones. If this is supposed to be the grand moral of the story, that if you just endure suffering quietly, God will hand your stuff back, it feels incredibly transactional.

It feels emotionally empty. Honestly, it feels like a hollow payout. But, as you'll see, that uneasy feeling in your gut is actually our very first clue that we've been reading it all wrong.

To really figure this out, we've got to realize one absolutely crucial thing. The epilogue is just tying up loose ends. Dr. Walton makes it super clear that the real, concluding message of the book is not actually found in this epilogue.

The true message already happened. It came out of God's speeches from the whirlwind. By the time we hit chapter 42, verse 7, the grand philosophical arguments are totally over.

The epilogue is strictly a narrative mechanism. It's just there to resolve the lingering plot threads before the curtain drops. But, ironically, it's exactly these loose ends that have caused massive confusion for readers over the years.

So, to untangle them, we need to look at the exact words God uses when he finally speaks to Job's friends. And that brings us to our first major piece of evidence. In the text, God reprimands Job's friends, saying they haven't spoken the truth as Job has.

But wait, what kind of truth? Well, the Hebrew word used here is *nekonah*. *Nekolah* indicates a truth that is logical, sensible, and verifiable. But hold on a second.

If you know the book, you know Job said a ton of things during his suffering that were definitely not right. He accused God of being unjust, of basically acting like a vicious predator. So why in the world is God suddenly giving Job this blanket stamp of approval and calling his words *nekonah*? Well, actually, scratch that.

It's more like a massive paradigm shift caused by, of all things, a simple translation error. See, many English translations, like the NIV, say the friends did not speak the truth about God as Job did. But Dr. Walton points out that the specific combination of the Hebrew verb and preposition used in this spot consistently means to speak to someone who is actually present—not about them, to them.

God isn't saying Job had perfectly accurate, flawless theology about him for 40 chapters. No way. God is saying, you haven't spoken truth to me like Job just did.

Let's look at how this actually plays out right before God reprimands the friends. It happens in three steps. Step one, Job offers this humble, penitent prayer directly to God in the first six verses of chapter 42.

Step two, God approves of this specific prayer. He's validating Job's final, direct response, not rubber stamping 40 chapters of angry rants. And step three, where are the friends during all this? They are completely silent.

They haven't spoken to God at all. They aren't repenting. So God's anger isn't about the friends losing a theological debate.

It's about their total failure to approach him in humility, which is exactly what Job just did. You know, this whole spoken-to versus spoken-about thing also clears up a really fun piece of Bible trivia regarding a character named Elihu. You might remember him.

He's the younger guy who jumps in way late in the story. So God reprimands Eliphaz and the other two older friends, but he leaves Elihu entirely out of the punishment. Why? Well, some scholars thought maybe Elihu was just a later edit, awkwardly shoved into the manuscript.

But Dr. Walton points out something so much simpler. Elihu isn't punished because he actually did speak right about God. It's a fascinating little detail, and it proves the original author knew exactly what they were doing with the narrative structure the whole time.

Okay, let's take a step back for a second because understanding this next part requires a pretty massive shift in how we approach the entire text. Dr. Walton suggests that the book of Job is actually a thought experiment. It's designed specifically to explore divine policies.

This is a total game changer. It means we don't have to tie ourselves up in emotional knots imagining a literal historical guy somehow getting over the tragic, horrifying deaths of his first kids just because he got a new batch. In the framework of a philosophical thought experiment, the restoration isn't about replacing human lives.

It's simply a narrative device used to prove a point about how the cosmos operates. So how much obligation does God actually have to the so-called retribution principle? Zero. Literally none.

The retribution principle is basically the idea that if you're good, you'll prosper and if you're bad, you'll suffer. It's a vending machine mindset. Early in the book, the challenger claimed that God's policy of blessing righteous people was just a bribe.

Job, on the other hand, claimed God's policy of letting righteous people suffer was totally unjust. But by restoring Job's prosperity at the very end, God is showing that his policies remain completely unchanged. The accusations from the challenger just bounced right off.

God has absolutely zero obligation to make the universe operate like a predictable vending machine. To really wrap our heads around this, we have to look at how the characters desperately tried to force the cosmos into a neat little box. They built what we can call the human justice triangle.

The three points of this triangle are the retribution principle, Job's righteousness, and God's justice. Job's friends looked at this triangle and said, well, God is just, and the retribution principle is definitely true. So, Job, buddy, you must not be righteous.

But Job looked at the exact same triangle and said, I know for a fact I'm righteous, and the retribution principle is true. So, God, you must not be just. They were all completely trapped in this strict transactional framework, trying to force God into a simple math equation.

And here's the absolute punchline of this entire explainer. God completely rejects the triangle. He doesn't just pick a different corner to stand on to win the argument.

He takes this entire human attempt to understand the ordering of the cosmos. He literally crumples it up, and he throws it away. God does not buy the triangle idea.

It's a flawed, simplistic equation that simply doesn't reflect reality. God cannot and will not be boxed in by our rigid systems of human justice and our transactional demands. Which leads us to the textual solution for the whole book.

We all kind of naturally want to live in a cosmos based on justice, right? A place where every single good deed gets a gold star and every bad deed gets an immediate, obvious punishment. It feels safe. It feels predictable.

But Dr. Walton explains that the foundation of the cosmos is not justice. It is a cosmos based on wisdom. God operates the universe according to his infinite, completely unfathomable wisdom.

And frankly, divine wisdom is very often going to look incredibly confusing or even straight up unfair from our extremely limited human perspective. So what does that mean for the end of the story? When Job finally gets his wealth back, we have to view it through this new lens. Prosperity is a gift.

It is not a reward. Job did not earn his restoration by finally saying the magic prayer at the end. And God definitely wasn't obliged to give it to him just to balance out some cosmic scales.

What looks like retribution or a well-deserved reward is actually just the ripple effect of God's character. It is God's pleasure to bless, but it is never ever his obligation. Job received it simply as a gracious gift from a wise creator.

Plain and simple. Now, I want to talk directly to you for a second, because this realization is probably going to subvert everything you might have been taught in Sunday school. We are not supposed to be like Job.

The whole purpose of this book is not for us to model our behavior after Job as a character, or to console ourselves with the expectation that if we just suffer quietly enough, someday we'll get a massive payout. That is entirely missing the point. Job is a stand-in.

He's a participant in this grand thought experiment, and we are supposed to learn alongside him, not just copy him. Dr. Walton summarizes the true explanation of the book so perfectly. He says, The only explanation the book offers is concerning right-thinking about God and his policies in a world where suffering is pervasive and inevitable.

Notice what that doesn't say. It does not give us the specific why for our own personal suffering. It doesn't promise us a neat and tidy happy ending in this life.

Gaining this wisdom doesn't necessarily ease our pain either. But it does do something much more important. It helps us avoid the total foolishness of rejecting God when we are hurting and when we need him the most.

So that leaves us with a pretty heavy, provocative question. How do you view prosperity and suffering in your own life? Are you, deep down, secretly still holding on to that justice triangle? Do you quietly view your successes as rewards you've rightfully earned, and your hardships as signs that God must be angry with you? The true ending of Job is actually an invitation. It invites us to let go of those transactional demands, to step out of the courtroom, and to trust in the wild, unfathomable wisdom of a God who simply cannot be boxed in.

Thanks for exploring this with me today, and I really hope this completely changes the way you read this ancient text. Keep learning, and I'll see you next time.