

Dr. John Walton, Job, Session 27, 6-min. Video Overview

BiblicalLearning.org by Ted Hildebrandt

Welcome to the explainer. Honestly, I am so glad you're here today because we are tackling what is arguably one of the most famously misunderstood texts in human history. Today, we're exploring Dr. John Walton's absolutely fascinating theological analysis of the book of Job.

Now, you know, when we think of Job, we usually just think of suffering, right? But Dr. Walton argues there's actually a much deeper layer here about how we fundamentally view who God is. And well, spoiler alert, the protagonist gets a whole lot of it wrong. So let's dive right into this.

Here's a quick roadmap for this explainer. We're going to hit five main areas. First, learning from flawed theology.

Then we'll ask, is God petty? Is God unjust? Can God be manipulated? And finally, we'll talk about rebuilding our theology. Basically, to find the really good theology in this book, we're going to play Mythbusters and deconstruct Job's bad theology step-by-step. All right, part one, learning from flawed theology.

So Dr. Walton presents this kind of counterintuitive premise here. He says we actually build our understanding of the book of Job by studying Job's false views of God. Like we aren't looking at Job as this perfect theological role model.

Instead, we're looking at his mistakes and contrasting those flawed views with the correct theological reality. And you know, when life doesn't go our way, we tend to fall into the exact same traps Job did. His ancient misconceptions perfectly mirror our own modern frustrations.

When we suffer, we just start projecting our own anxieties right onto God. Let's look at the first major misconception. Part two: Is God petty? In chapters seven and 14, Job develops this really intense fear that God is basically an over-attentive micromanager, just heavily focused on judgment.

He's essentially crying out, what does he want from me? I've done everything he asked. And man, it is so easy to empathize with that, isn't it? It's this completely universal, highly emotional response to suffering. When things go wrong, we start wondering if God is punishing us for some tiny slight or some minor lapse from like a decade ago; we start feeling like God is just clutching onto our mistakes and absolutely refusing to let go.

But we've got to contrast that misconception with reality. Job's myth is that God is this exacting, petty micromanager, but the reality is that God knows our frailties. Dr. Walton points out that yes, Matthew 5:48 says God is perfect and calls us to perfection, but that does not mean he mercilessly audits our tiny, minute deviations. Scripture like over in Psalm 103 assures us that God knows our weaknesses.

He literally knows we're frail. So we really have to completely rethink this idea that God is petty. Okay.

Part three: Is God unjust? This brings us to the second and honestly, probably the heaviest of Job's misconceptions. He begins to actively accuse God of lacking justice. Now, the absolutely crucial point here is understanding the word Mishpat.

It's the Hebrew word for justice. In Job 19 seven, Job explicitly claims there's no Mishpat, none. And a bit later in chapter 27, he asserts that God has actually withheld Mishpat from him.

Job feels like God is just not living up to what we should reasonably expect of him. And Job's accusations get incredibly intense. By chapter 16, he literally lines up these titles for God.

He calls him an assailant, an opponent, a betrayer, and a warrior with no pity. I mean, wow. Job demands a hearing in court.

He's formally accusing God of abuse of power, shifting from asking who could challenge God to flat-out claiming God destroys both the blameless and the wicked. Let's pivot to today for a second and just look in the mirror. Why do we, just like Job, feel so deeply betrayed when we see things in the world that bother us? Well, it's because we've accepted a totally flawed premise.

We assume that if God is all-powerful and justice flows from him, then our day-to-day experience should constantly reflect that perfect justice. And when it doesn't, we feel totally let down. Let's demystify this by looking at Dr. Walton's breakdown of how the cosmos actually works.

The world isn't just one simple thing. It features order, non-order, and disorder. Order reflects God's design and wisdom.

Non-order is just a lack of strict structure. And disorder is where chaos and suffering live. Now God is the source of order, and he completely controls the non-order and the disorder, but because all three exist together in this world, strict justice simply cannot perfectly reign in every single circumstance.

I absolutely love this quote from Dr. Walton because it clears everything up. He says, the flaw in this thinking is that it assumes that the cosmos is stamped with the attributes of God. You see, God's day-by-day plan is not to ensure justice in every single moment.

His design is a reflection of his profound wisdom. We simply cannot appraise God by our outside human standards of justice because doing that actually tries to make him less than God. All right, on to part four.

Can God be manipulated? So when Job fails to get his day in court to challenge God's justice, he pivots his strategy. He tries to maneuver God right into a corner. In chapter 31, Job takes what's called the oath of innocence.

He basically lists all the offenses he hasn't committed and then invites God to strike him dead if he's actually guilty. It's incredibly manipulative. God had been silent, and Job was trying to weaponize that silence against him.

He thinks he can force God's hand. Either God acts and proves himself inconsistent, or God stays silent. And Job takes that as tacit, passive vindication of his own innocence.

And let's look at how this bleeds right into our lives today. We see Job's ancient belief that God can be managed or outmaneuvered through ritual approaches. But guess what? We do this too.

We have our own modern transactions. We frequently fall into the trap of thinking we can somehow manage God's behavior based purely on what we do. Dr. Walton points out some really specific ways we adopt this benefits-oriented mindset.

You know, giving financially, perfect church attendance, worship, or just the rigid performance of Christian disciplines. We falsely believe that if we just insert these good deeds like coins into a vending machine, we can force God to dispense the comfortable life we want. Dr. Walton strongly warns that we absolutely must not tolerate this mindset in ourselves.

Finally, part five: rebuilding our theology. So now that we've broken down these deeply flawed views, how do we actually move forward? Well, here are the core takeaways from Dr. Walton's lecture in three simple steps. Step one, recognize Job's errors in thinking about God.

Step two, spot these exact same inclinations in ourselves when times get tough. And step three, correct our misconceptions by actively discarding the myths that God is petty or unjust or manipulable. We protect ourselves from bad theology when we inevitably face hardship in our own lives.

I want to leave you with one final provocative thought. If God isn't a micromanager keeping a ledger of your every flaw, and if he isn't a transactional vending machine you can just manipulate, and if he isn't bound by our extremely limited human standards of day-to-day justice, how does that change the way you view your own suffering? Discarding these myths is just the first step. It clears the slate so we can truly explore the actual theology of suffering next time.

Thanks for hanging out with me on this explainer, and keep asking those big questions.