

Dr. John Walton, Job, Session 2 – Podcast

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Welcome to another Deep Dive. You know, you guys sent in some fascinating material this time around. Oh, yeah? Yeah, a lecture by this biblical scholar, John Walton, and he's talking about the Book of Job and the date and authorship, all that stuff.

I know, on the surface that sounds kind of dry, right? Yeah, like week-old toast. Exactly. And what's cool is you specifically asked to learn about the stuff surrounding the book, not the book itself.

Interesting. So that's where this gets really, really interesting. Yeah, like textual archaeologists.

Yes. We're going digging for- we're digging deep. ... all those layers- Exactly.

... of history and culture. So let's dive right in. Right off the bat, Walton kind of throws us a curveball.

Yeah. He says we have to think differently about what a book even was back then. Okay.

He says, you know, the ancient world was hearing-dominant, meaning the spoken word was king. So can you kind of unpack that for us a little bit? Sure, yeah. Imagine like a world where, you know, most people couldn't read.

Scribes are rare. Books are really precious. So you're not going to encounter Job, you know, sitting down with a scroll and reading it.

Right. You're going to experience it through, like, a skilled storyteller or something. Like, think about how we get legal documents today.

Right. Most of us, we don't just, you know, pull out the contract and read it line by line. Yeah.

We rely on a lawyer to break it down. Exactly. And it's kind of like that back then.

So like legal documents, most written texts were probably kept in archives, and you wouldn't just, you know, read them for fun. So it's a completely different way of thinking about how a book even functions. Right.

So where does Job fit in with all of this? Walton says, and this is interesting, he says it might be kind of unique, even among other biblical texts. Yeah. Because unlike, say, the Psalms, which we know were like compiled and edited over centuries, you know, Job feels different.

It feels very deliberate. Right. Like somebody sat down and said, I'm going to write this.

The language is super sophisticated. Yeah. It's got this like structure to it.

The speeches. It's like the difference between a folk tale that's passed down generation to generation and a play that's like performed on a stage. Right.

Exactly. So if it's so deliberate, how do we even know when it was written? So that's where it gets even trickier. Okay.

Walton makes this really important distinction between dating the events in Job and dating, you know, the writing of the book itself. The actual book. Okay.

He points to some clues. Like Job himself might've lived way back in the day, you know, in a really early period. Okay.

Like the text mentions this currency called the Qesita. Qesita. Yeah.

And that was only used in like the really old days. Interesting. Okay.

So Job, the person might be ancient, but the book itself could be much, much later. Potentially. Yeah.

But if we're not going by the story itself, then how can we tell? Yeah. We've got to look for clues within the actual writing itself. Okay.

And that's a whole other can of worms. We'll save that for later. We'll get there.

But there is one last point from this lecture I do want to touch on, and it's a little bit of a head scratcher. Okay. Job himself, he's not an Israelite, but the book, it seems to be written for an Israelite audience.

Yeah. So how does that work? That's a great question. Wouldn't that make it less relevant? You know what I mean? Right.

Well, think about it this way. Okay. What if you had a story that was rooted in like ancient Egyptian mythology, but you wanted to adapt it for like a Greek audience? You would weave in things that the Greeks would understand.

Ah. Okay. So it's like, even though Job is this outsider, the book has been shaped to speak to this specific audience.

That's amazing. But then that leaves me wondering, what were they trying to say to them? And how does this story told through this non-Israelite guy, how does that give them and us timeless wisdom? Yeah. That's the big question.

Good question. Lots to think about. We'll be right back after this short break.

So okay. My brain's still trying to wrap itself around all that. If this book is aimed at Israelites, what were the challenges they were dealing with that this story would speak to? That's where we've got to put on our ancient scribe hats and really look for those clues hidden within the text.

So Walton points out that some scholars look at Job and say, well, it doesn't mention any of the big Israelite stuff. Okay. Like no covenant, no law, no temple.

But they're saying it's too different. It can't be Israelite. Yeah, basically.

But Walton has this really cool counterargument. He's like, well, if Job's not even an Israelite, why would those things be there in the first place? Yeah. And it'd be like looking for a football in a story about ancient Greece.

Huh. Good point. Yeah.

Totally different ballgame. Exactly. So, okay.

If it's not the missing Israelite stuff, then what clues point to this Israelite orientation you mentioned earlier? True. Yeah. That's the thing.

In this particular lecture, Walton doesn't really go into specifics about that, but he does give us a really helpful way to think about the whole point of the book. He reminds us that Job, at its core, is about wisdom, right? These big universal questions about suffering and justice and God, you know. So maybe we're getting a little too hung up on the whole when was it written thing and missing the bigger picture.

Exactly. It's less about nailing down the precise historical date and more about understanding the wisdom that's embedded in this story. Wisdom that transcends time and culture.

You know, I always struggle with those parts in Job where he's arguing with his friends. It felt so philosophical and dense. But if I come at it from a wisdom angle, it feels more, I don't know, approachable.

I can actually learn something from Job's struggle. Yeah. It's about connecting with those universal human questions we all ask, right? Yeah.

Why do bad things happen? How do we deal with pain? Where's God in all this? Yeah. It's less about finding the perfect answer and more about engaging with the conversation itself. Right.

Wrestling with it. Yeah. The struggle is part of the point.

Absolutely. I think that's where the real power of this book comes in. It lets us wrestle with these huge questions to confront the limits of what we can understand and embrace the mystery of faith.

So even though Job wasn't an Israelite, this book speaks to something way deeper. Something anyone, anywhere can connect with. Exactly.

Anyone who's ever struggled with these big questions. Right. And you know what? In our next part, we're going to explore exactly how Job's experience gives us timeless insights for navigating our own doubts and struggles.

I am ready. Let's do it. It's amazing, right? I thought we'd be hunched over ancient scrolls for this deep dive.

Yeah. And instead, we're having this really deep conversation. Amazing what a little perspective shift can do, huh? Yeah, totally.

We've gone from like, when was it written to, wow, this book is about the human experience. And that leads us to Walton's big takeaway, that whole wisdom thing at the heart of Job. And that's what makes this book so powerful even today, right? Yeah.

It's dealing with these fundamental questions. Why do bad things happen to good people? Where's God when we're hurting? It's like, even though the world's changed so much since then, those core struggles, they're still the same. And Walton says the wisdom in Job is not about finding easy answers.

It's more about that process of wrestling with the tough questions, like grappling with the mystery of faith. I used to think having faith meant having all the answers. But Job shows us, it's okay to not know, to question, even to be angry at God.

Yeah, Job gives us permission to be real about our struggles. And his conversations with God, they're so raw and honest. They show us a way to deal with those tough times in our own lives.

I remember when I was going through a really rough patch, a friend actually recommended Job. Oh. Yeah.

At first I was like, no way, I'm hurting enough already. Yeah. But I finally read it, and it was like, Job put into words everything I was feeling but couldn't say.

Yeah. These old texts, they give us a way to talk about those universal human experiences: pain, loss, questions, all that. And they remind us we're not alone in it.

So Walton leaves us with this really thought-provoking question. Okay. He says, what kind of wisdom do you think is most relevant today? What would a modern-day book of Job look like? Wow.

That's a good one. What stories would we tell? What challenges would be front and center? Makes me think about all the ways people suffer today. Not just physical stuff, but you know, injustice, climate change, all that.

Yeah. And how do we even think about faith in a world that feels so chaotic? I don't know, but I feel like this deep dive, it's just the start of a much bigger conversation. Yeah, for sure.

And that's what it's all about, right? Getting people curious, thinking deeper, and finding their own meaning in these texts and stories. Couldn't have said it better myself. So what about you guys listening? What really hit home for you from Job's story? What wisdom speaks to your life? We'd love to hear your thoughts.

Until next time, keep diving deep.