

Dr. John Walton, Job, Session 15 – Podcast

BiblicaleLearning.org [BeL]

Welcome to another Deep Dive. This time we're going to be looking at Job 19.25. Oh yeah, Job 19.25. And we're going to be exploring it with some help from Old Testament scholar John Walton. Right, John Walton.

And so, you know, in this verse we have Job who's obviously suffering tremendously, and he cries out about a redeemer. But what does this really mean, especially in the Old Testament context? You know, we're going to find out some interesting things. Absolutely.

So to get us started, I'll just give a little background. Okay. This single verse has just sparked centuries of debate and interpretation.

And it gets to the heart of some of the biggest questions that are in the book of Job: suffering, justice, and, you know, our relationship with God. Yeah. So John Walton points out that the word often translated as redeemer is the Hebrew *goel*.

Right. And it has a very specific legal meaning in ancient Israel. Yeah, *goel* is a very interesting word because it's not about forgiveness of sins.

Yeah, it wasn't about that. No, it's not like that. It was about something else.

Think of the *goel* as sort of like a legal avenger, someone who's fighting for justice for someone who's been wronged. Yeah. They were responsible for restoring their honor and property.

So Job isn't seeking forgiveness here. No. He's adamant about his innocence.

Yeah, he wants his name cleared. He wants vindication. His reputation restored.

Yeah, he wants his reputation restored. And this actually challenges a lot of the traditional interpretations. It really does.

So some people see the advocate as just simply Job expressing his inner turmoil. And then other people see it as like a prefiguration of Jesus. Right.

But Walton pushes back on those interpretations. Yeah, he does. Job repeatedly asks for an advocate throughout the book.

So it's not just like a fleeting thought. Yeah, it's a consistent theme. It's a consistent theme.

And no New Testament writer directly links Job 19.25 to Christ. Yeah, I mean, imposing a later theological concept onto Job. Yeah.

Really kind of distorts what he's saying in his own historical context. Right. We've got to remember that we're dealing with an ancient text here.

Yeah. With its own unique cultural background. Right.

So one of the most intriguing possibilities that Walton raises is that Job might be seeking an advocate from among the divine council. The divine council. You know, this concept appears in other parts of the Old Testament.

Now, what is the divine council all about? OK, so imagine you have this heavenly court, and God is presiding. OK. And he's surrounded by all these other divine beings who advise and participate in decision-making.

OK. Job might be appealing to someone within this heavenly hierarchy to represent him before God. OK.

To plead his case for vindication. So it's not just Job versus God. No.

He's caught in this cosmic web of relationships and power dynamics. Absolutely. This adds a whole new dimension to the story.

And to add even more complexity to that. OK. Later in the book, a new character appears, Elihu.

And Elihu sees himself as Job's advocate. OK. So does Elihu actually deliver the vindication that Job is looking for? Well, not exactly.

Elihu believes he understands God's perspective perfectly. And he thinks that Job simply needs to just submit and accept his suffering. But he doesn't really grasp Job's need for his innocence to be acknowledged.

Yeah, it sounds like Elihu ends up adding to Job's sense of isolation and injustice rather than giving him the support he desperately needs. Yeah, it kind of backfires a little bit. Where does that leave Job then? Well, there's one more piece of the puzzle that we need to explore.

OK. It's that debated phrase in Job 19.25. After my skin has been destroyed yet in my flesh, I will see God. That's a really powerful image.

Oh, it is. What's Walton's take on that? So he dismisses the idea that Job is talking about resurrection. OK.

But that wasn't really a common concept in the Old Testament. Instead, he suggests that Job is anticipating a last-minute reprieve, a restoration to God's favor before he dies. So even in his physical and emotional agony, Job is clinging to this sliver of hope that God will see his innocence and vindicate him before he dies.

There's such urgency and pathos in his plea. Yeah. He's not looking for a reward in the afterlife.

No. He wants justice now. He wants vindication in this life.

Yeah. And this brings us to a crucial point that Walton makes: Job is seeking vindication, not justification. OK.

Now, what's the difference? So justification is about forgiveness of sins. OK. It's about someone taking the punishment on our behalf.

Vindication is about having our innocence proven. OK. Our reputation restored.

So this is where those comparisons to Jesus, like seeking to atone for our sins, completely fall apart. Yeah, they really do. Job isn't asking for that at all.

He's not asking for someone to die for his sins. Yeah. He's proclaiming, I'm innocent.

I deserve to be seen as righteous. Exactly. So if Job isn't looking for a savior in the traditional sense, what does that tell us about his understanding of suffering? Right.

And his relationship with God? Well, that's a great question and one that we will explore in the next part of our deep dive. OK, awesome. We're going to explore the implications of Walton's analysis.

Yeah. And how it challenges our perspectives on these timeless questions. That sounds great.

I can't wait. All right, let's take a break. OK.

We've established that Job's cry for a goel, an advocate, is a plea for vindication, not forgiveness. Right. And if he isn't focused on sin and punishment, then what does his experience tell us about suffering and our relationship with God? It feels like we've kind of shifted the whole conversation away from whether Job deserves his suffering.

Well, that's precisely the point of the Book of Job, according to Walton. OK. It's not about sin and redemption.

It's a raw exploration of the human struggle with pain and loss and God's silence in the midst of it all. It's definitely something we can all relate to. Oh, absolutely.

I mean, who hasn't felt like they were going through a Job-like experience where everything falls apart, and you're questioning everything you thought you knew about life and faith? It's a universal human experience. Yeah. And that's why the Book of Job resonates with people even today.

It doesn't shy away from the hard questions. Right. It wrestles with the mystery of suffering.

Yeah. And the limits of our understanding. So if we're not supposed to read Job as a story about sin and punishment, then what is the message? Well, Walton suggests that Job offers a different framework for understanding our relationship with God.

OK. It's not about earning God's favor through good deeds. OK.

Or avoiding his wrath through obedience. It's about acknowledging the vastness of God's wisdom and power. OK.

Which often goes beyond our comprehension. So it's like Job is saying that God's ways are not our ways. We may never fully understand why things happen, but that doesn't mean that God is absent or uncaring.

Right. It challenges the idea that good behavior equals blessings and bad behavior equals punishment. Yeah.

Job's experience complicates that simplistic equation. Yeah. It definitely seems like he's saying that bad things happen to good people and sometimes there's just no explanation.

But that doesn't invalidate our faith. It just makes it more of a mystery. And within that mystery, there's room for lament, questioning, and wrestling with God.

Job expresses his anger and frustration, and that becomes a vital part of his spiritual journey. Yeah. He's modeling a more authentic way of relating to God.

Yeah. Not blind acceptance or forced piety, but honest dialogue, even when it's messy and painful. And in that dialogue, in that wrestling, there's potential for growth and a deeper understanding of both ourselves and the divine.

Okay. It's not about finding all the answers. Okay.

But about embracing the questions and allowing them to shape us. So it's not about getting God to explain himself. It's more about allowing our experience of suffering to transform us.

You could say that. Okay. It's about recognizing that suffering, while unwanted and often inexplicable, can be a catalyst for spiritual growth.

Okay. It can force us to confront our assumptions and our limitations and lead us to a more profound understanding of God's presence in our lives, even in the midst of pain. This is a lot to take in.

Yeah, it is. But there's one more crucial point that Walton brings up. The ending of the book where God finally speaks to Job.

Right. The moment we've all been waiting for. It's like the climax of the story.

Yeah. Job finally gets to confront God to demand answers to plead his case. And what happens? Something totally unexpected.

Okay. Instead of giving Job an explanation, God responds with a series of questions and poetic descriptions of the natural world. It's as if God is asking Job, can you truly grasp the scope of my wisdom and power? Exactly.

It's God's answer to Job's plea for vindication. Okay. Not a legal declaration of innocence, but a cosmic perspective shift.

An invitation to see things from a wider lens. Okay. And acknowledge the limits of human understanding.

So it's not about winning or losing an argument. Yeah. It's about expanding our awareness.

Yeah. Humbling ourselves before the mystery of the divine. Exactly.

Okay. Ultimately, Job accepts this. Okay.

He doesn't get all the answers he wanted, but he comes to a place of peace and acceptance. He recognizes that true faith isn't about having all the answers, but trusting in God's goodness, even when we don't understand his ways. This is a pretty different way of thinking about suffering and justice than we're used to.

It challenges our notions of fairness and control. It forces us to confront that life is often unpredictable and messy. And sometimes there are no easy answers.

But even in that uncertainty, there's a strange comfort. Yeah. The comfort of knowing that we're not alone in our struggles, and that even in the darkest of times, there's a divine presence that sustains us.

And that brings us back to Job's cry for a goel, an advocate. Perhaps in the end, the advocate wasn't a specific divine being or a human champion. Right.

Perhaps it was the very experience of suffering itself. Forcing him to confront his limitations, to deepen his faith, and ultimately find a new level of intimacy with God. That's a really interesting thought.

The journey itself becomes the advocate, the catalyst for transformation and growth. Exactly. So what does this all mean for us? How do we apply these ancient teachings to our modern lives? That's a great question.

And one we'll explore in the final part of our deep dive. We'll discuss the practical implications of Job's journey, and how his story can offer us guidance and hope as we navigate our experiences of suffering and uncertainty. All right.

Sounds good. We've journeyed through Job 19.25. We've explored this ancient concept of a goal, and we've considered all these implications of Job's cry for vindication. Yeah.

But how do we actually apply these ancient teachings to our own lives? It's a great question, because Job's story, it's not just some ancient philosophical puzzle. Right. It really speaks to the enduring power of the human spirit to grapple with suffering and doubt and the search for meaning.

Yeah. His journey offers us, I think, some practical guidance as we navigate our own challenges. So what are some of the key takeaways that we can apply to our lives? Well, I think Job teaches us the importance of embracing lament.

Okay. He never shies away from expressing his pain, his anger, his frustration to God. He doesn't try to pretend that everything is okay when it's clearly not.

So he's kind of giving us permission to be real with God, to bring our whole selves to the table. Yeah. Even the messy parts.

That's right. So often, we're taught to suppress negative emotions and put on this brave face. Yeah.

But Job, he reminds us that authentic faith means acknowledging the full range of human experience, including those dark and difficult emotions. So instead of burying our pain, we should allow ourselves to grieve and question and, you know, express our doubts and fears. All part of the process.

And it's through that raw honesty with ourselves and with God that we can begin to find healing and growth. Yeah. It's not about denying the pain.

It's about transforming it. That definitely takes the pressure off of having to have it all together all the time. It does.

It gives us that space to just be human and acknowledge our struggles. What else can we learn from Job? Well, Job's encounter with God forces him to confront the limits of his own understanding. Okay.

He realizes that God's ways are not our ways. There are these mysteries that we may never fully comprehend. Humility is such an important part of navigating life's complexities.

It is. Especially when you're dealing with suffering and loss. Yeah.

It allows us to acknowledge that we don't have all the answers. Absolutely. Instead of trying to, you know, force our limited perspective on a situation, we can approach it with openness and wonder.

Okay. Recognizing that there might be something larger at play than we can currently grasp. It seems like Job's story ultimately points to the importance of trusting in God's goodness, even when we don't understand his ways.

Yes. Job's story doesn't offer easy answers or tie things up neatly. Right.

But ultimately, he comes to a place of peace and acceptance. He doesn't get a detailed explanation for his suffering. Okay.

But he does experience a sense of God's presence, of being held and loved, even in the midst of his pain. It's a powerful testament to the nature of faith. It is.

It's not about having all the answers. It's about trusting in God's love and wisdom, even when we can't see the whole picture. Even when life feels chaotic and unfair, and we're wrestling with doubt and despair, we can hold on to the belief that there's a deeper purpose at work, a divine love that sustains us through it all.

Job's cry for a goel, an advocate. What if the advocate wasn't a person or a being? Right. What if it was the experience of suffering itself, pushing him to confront his limitations, deepen his faith, and discover a new level of intimacy with God? That's a profound thought.

Yeah. The journey itself becomes the advocate. Yeah.

The catalyst for transformation and growth. Suffering is an inevitable part of life. It is.

But it can lead us to a deeper understanding of ourselves, our faith, and the mystery of the divine. Exactly. So the next time we're going through something difficult, maybe instead of asking, why me? We can ask, what can I learn from this? Yeah.

How could I let this experience bring me closer to God, even if I don't understand it right now? That's a beautiful way to frame it. Job's story invites us to embrace the complexities of life, to find meaning in suffering, and to trust in God's love, even when we can't see the path ahead. This deep dive has been quite a journey.

It has. We've gone from a single verse to a cosmic courtroom. Yeah.

From ancient legal concepts to profound spiritual insights. Yeah, right. And I hope this has encouraged you to revisit the book of Job and to see it not just as a story about suffering, but as a guide for navigating the complexities of faith and the human experience.

Absolutely. As we wrap up this deep dive, we leave you with this. What if suffering, instead of something to be feared, is an opportunity for growth, for transformation, for a deeper connection with the divine? Yeah.

What if our greatest challenges actually lead us to our most significant spiritual breakthroughs? Until next time, keep seeking, keep questioning, and keep diving into the depths of knowledge and wisdom. That's right.