

**The Book of Job**  
**Session 10: Sons of God and Satan**  
**By John Walton**

This is Dr. John Walton and his teaching on the Book of Job. This is session 10, Sons of God and Satan.

**Challenger's Report [00:23-1:03]**

So, the famous scene unfolds in the heavenly courts. God calls on the Challenger to make his report. What have you found? Again, this is simply the conversation that opens up the situation for us. It's not somehow an expression of God who doesn't know what's going on. He has tasked the Challenger to go and discover things and bring them. And so, the Challenger's playing the assigned role, and God is gathering information. That's what any good king would do. So, it's painting this situation in those terms.

**Disinterested Righteousness Question [1:03-2:27]**

The Challenger brings the case then as we've noted before. Great, look at what you've done for Job. You've given him all of this. And he says that you've put a hedge around him and his household, everything that he has. You've blessed the work of his hands so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land. But yeah, you've made it pretty easy for him; but does Job serve God for nothing? We've raised this already. This is the case of disinterested righteousness, that is, righteousness without self-interest. Does Job serve God for nothing? This challenge strikes right at the heart of the retribution principle and the great symbiosis, the terms that we've talked about. And the book's going to end up being a corrective for all of this.

**Will Job "curse" [barak] God? [2:27-3:52]**

So, we have this challenge: How will Job respond to suffering? Remember that we've talked about Job then as the star witness for the defense, the defense of God's

policies. How he responds will be important for determining whether blessing righteous people is an acceptable policy.

Now, the Challenger suggests that Job will curse God to his face. We've talked about this terminology before bless and curse every place in Job 1 and 2, where the text talks about cursing God in translations; the Hebrew word that's used is the Hebrew verb "barak," which means to bless. So again, in these contexts, in chapter one, verse 5, verse 11, chapter two, verses 5 and 9 in those contexts barak, which means blessed, is being used euphemistically to refer to curse. And it's translated as "blessed" in chapter one, verse 10, and verse 21. This use of euphemism produces an odd juxtaposition since the Challenger claims that Job will barak God to his face, meaning curse, yet in contrast, Job baraks God, meaning bless in 1.21. And so, it creates a very interesting kind of play on words as we work through the passage. And the decision of whether barak is a euphemism or whether it actually means "blessed" depends on the context of the sentence.

### **Extremes Disasters 3:52-4:35]**

Now, of course, once the Challenger has been given a free hand, there's a resulting tragedy. There are human foes. There is divine judgment from heaven. There is what could be called a natural disaster, all in rapid succession. Again, the fact that all areas are covered that all of them bring absolute disaster. "Only, I have escaped" that they come in rapid succession is all part of the extreme picture. Everything's got to be sudden and total for the whole picture of the book to work out.

### **Job's Response [4:35-5:50]**

In contrast, we look at Job's responses. First of all, he engages in the common acts of mourning. And so we have that described for us. Prostration is a response to something remarkable that God has done and represents acknowledgment and acceptance. And so, Job prostrates himself before God. Notice again and he considers this an act of God, not an independent act of some evil agent. He ends his speech with the

invocation of blessing on the name of God. "Naked, I came from my mother's womb, naked, I will depart. Yahweh has given, Yahweh has taken away. May the name of Yahweh be praised."

It's interesting that it uses the name of Yahweh here in Job's mouth, yet through all the speeches and all the discourses, Yahweh is never used until we get to Yahweh's speeches in chapter 38. Job always refers to God as El or Elohim or El Shaddai, never Yahweh, except here in the prologue and then in the Yahweh's speeches.

### **Blessing/Curse Play on the Word Barak [5:50-7:20]**

The Challenger said that he would curse the name of God. Job's speech ends with blessing of the name of God. But it's exactly what the Challenger said he would do and yet exactly the opposite. The challenge is that he would barak, and he baraks. So it's the same as what the Challenger said, but it's the opposite. Okay? Because the Challenger was using it as a euphemism, Job does bless God to his face, but with no euphemistic connotation. Job is not calling God to accountability. Whether God gives or takes away, he should be praised. God owes us nothing.

Now this is an admirable and commendable response. We'll find, of course, that Job doesn't manage to maintain this kind of pure response throughout the book. But it's easier at the beginning than it is as time goes on. I think many of us find it this way. When we face extended difficult situations, it's a little easier to be strong at the beginning, but things deteriorate as time goes on. The book tells us "that in all this Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing." Yet he considered God to be the one who had done it, but he's not seeking to hold God accountable.

### **Hidden Information: Heavenly Scene [7:20-9:39]**

Now in the rhetorical strategy of the book, how does this first scene in heaven work? Well, first of all, it does indicate to us that Job is indeed innocent of wrongdoing. It eliminates then the usual answers of the ancient Near East, as I've mentioned earlier. It makes room for some new solutions to think differently about the situation. Again, all the

extremes create that room for consideration. Again, it shows us the Job is not on trial. The scene in heaven targets God's policies. Job is just the test case.

We also find that the scene in heaven introduces the concept of hidden information. Remember that neither Job, nor his friends, will ever learn about this scene in heaven. They'll never be told what took place. They'll never have any explanation of what instituted all of this. They will never know. And so, in that case, Job is not offered reasons or answers or explanations of any sort. And so, we already see how hidden information is going to play into the book. We note that God both initiated the conversation and approved the course of action. He takes responsibility for it. And so, again, we find that the Challenger is simply a catalyst simply, narratively speaking, to this particular set of circumstances that unfolds.

The scene in heaven itself is removed from Job's knowledge. And therefore, is not there to give us as readers a behind-the-scenes reason by which we can ourselves hold God accountable or evaluate him. It's, rather, pulling all of those things out of the picture so that we can discuss this whole idea of how it is that we think about God.

### **God's Policies Cannot Be Reduced to an Equation [9:39-10:16]**

Job thought in terms of the retribution principle. He thought that God's actions could be reduced to a simple equation. Many people today think the same thing. It's always a mistake. So, the scene in heaven, this first scene, has opened up the scenario, but it's not done yet. There's a second scene in heaven, and we'll be talking about that in the next segment.

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