

## Dr. John Walton, Job, Session 9 Scene in Heaven, Part 1 Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Study Guide, 4) Briefing Document, and 5) FAQs

### 1. Abstract of Walton, Job, Session 9, Scene in Heaven, Part 1, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

**Dr. John Walton's lecture** analyzes the Book of Job's depiction of the "Satan" character. **He argues** that the Hebrew term "hasatan" signifies a role, not a personal name, and represents a challenger or adversary within God's heavenly council. **Walton emphasizes** that this character acts as God's agent, challenging God's policies rather than directly tempting or harming Job. **The lecture concludes** that this "challenger" is a minor literary construct, not the devil, and shouldn't be assigned blame for Job's suffering. **Ultimately**, the focus should remain on God's testing of Job's righteousness.

**2. 12 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of  
Dr. Walton's, Job, Session 9 – Double click icon to play in  
Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL]  
Site and click the audio podcast link there (Old Testament →  
Psalms & Wisdom → Job → Walton).**



**Walton\_Job\_Session  
n09.mp3**

### 3. Briefing Document

Okay, here's a briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from the provided excerpt of John Walton's "Session 9: Scene in Heaven, Part 1" on the Book of Job:

#### **Briefing Document: John Walton on Job Session 9 - The Heavenly Council & The Challenger**

**Date:** October 26, 2023 **Source:** Excerpt from "Walton\_Job\_Session09.pdf" **Author:** Dr. John Walton **Subject:** Analysis of the opening scene in the Book of Job, focusing on the heavenly council and the character of "hasatan" (the challenger).

#### **Executive Summary:**

This session of John Walton's lecture series on Job focuses on the opening scene in heaven and challenges traditional interpretations of "Satan." Walton argues that the Hebrew term "hasatan," literally "the satan" or "the challenger," should be understood not as a personal name for the devil, but as a role or function within the heavenly court. He emphasizes that this "challenger" is not inherently evil, but rather acts as an agent of God, testing and challenging divine policies. Walton stresses that the "challenger" is a literary construct used to set up the central question of Job's righteousness and the nature of suffering, and is not intended to be an explanation of evil in the world.

#### **Key Themes and Ideas:**

##### **1. The Heavenly Council:**

- The scene opens with Yahweh holding an audience with his divine council, the "sons of God."
- This council is presented as a normal part of God's workings, not as a sign of his lack of omniscience. Walton notes, "God has chosen to work with the council...God doesn't need other beings. He doesn't need anyone to counsel him, but if he chooses to work that way, that's his business."
- This model of God working with a council is found elsewhere in the Old Testament (e.g., 1 Kings 22, Isaiah 6, Psalm 82).

##### **1. The Character of "hasatan" (The Challenger):**

- Walton makes a key distinction between the Hebrew "hasatan" and the later Christian concept of "Satan" as the devil.

- The Hebrew term has the definite article "ha," indicating it's a title describing a function, not a personal name. It should be translated "the challenger," not Satan as a personal name. As Walton states, "In Hebrew, that's 'ha'. So, it's hasatan. Satan is a Hebrew word...So, this is hasatan, the satan. Now that means it's not a personal name."
- The word "satan" is both a noun and verb. When used as a verb, it means "opposing, being an adversary, challenging someone."
- The "challenger" role isn't inherently evil, humans and non-human beings (like an angel) can perform this function. This point is supported by the scripture, "...it can be done by people in a court setting, a prosecuting attorney. It can even be done by the angel of the Lord who challenges a Balaam's movement in Numbers. 22, stands in his way as satan."
- The "challenger" does not become a personal name for the devil until after the Old Testament period.
- Walton also notes that "in the pseudepigraphal literature...it refers to many satans, not just one. It's not a personal name for the devil."

#### 1. **The Challenger as God's Agent:**

- In Job, the "challenger" acts as God's agent, sent out with a task and returning to report.
- The challenger questions God's policies—specifically, whether Job's righteousness is genuine because of his blessings. "He challenges God's policies...it's true that if righteous people continue to receive benefits, it may subvert their righteousness and give them an ulterior motive."
- The challenger isn't tempting or possessing Job. "He is not tempting. He's not possessing. He is not lying. There's no diabolical chuckle as he ruins Job. In fact, he only acts on God's behalf."
- God accepts responsibility for Job's suffering, indicating the challenger is not the primary actor responsible for evil in the narrative. "God is being held accountable by Job. God is seen as responsible. God has struck Job as much as the Challenger has."

### 1. **The Challenger is not Evil:**

- The text does not portray the challenger as taking delight in Job's suffering. "Neither character lacks a particularly or has a particularly sympathetic response."
- The challenger acts through God's power. As the text suggests, "Whatever the Challenger does, he does through the power of God."
- Walton points out, "Nothing intrinsically evil emerges in the author's portrayal of the Challenger."
- The angel of the Lord performing the role of satan is evidence that the role is not intrinsically evil.

### 1. **Literary Construct and Limited Theological Significance:**

- The "challenger" is a literary construct for the original Israelite audience, reflecting concepts familiar to them and serving to set the scene for the story's central conflict. He is not meant to be interpreted through a later New Testament or Greco-Roman lens. "The book of Job needs to be interpreted based on the profile that was available to the target audience as Israelites, not a later Greco-Roman audience--New Testament."
- He is of limited theological significance, mainly serving to question Job's motives and challenge God's policies. The challenger's role is to establish the challenge to Job, not to provide an explanation for suffering and evil. "He just helps set the scene as he questions Job's motives and challenges God's policies."
- The book is not suggesting that we ought to blame the devil for our suffering. As Walton suggests, "The book certainly is not suggesting that we ought to look for blame in the devil when we are suffering; that is not the teaching of the book."
- The "challenger" is a minor character and focusing too much on him is a distortion of the book's message. "He's a minor character playing a small part in the unfolding drama. And we give him too much attention at our peril because it distorts the message of the book."
- The main point of the text is to discover if Job's righteousness can withstand suffering. "Remember, suffering is the only way to test the mettle of Job's righteousness. And so, suffering is a path that the book is going to take."

**Conclusion:**

Walton's analysis of the opening scene in Job emphasizes the importance of understanding the text within its original cultural and literary context. By identifying the "challenger" not as a malevolent devil, but as a functionary within God's court, Walton reorients the reader to focus on the key questions of the book: the nature of righteousness, the problem of suffering, and God's character. The "challenger" serves only as a catalyst for these explorations, not as the source of evil.

## 4. Job Study Guide: Session 9, Scene in Heaven, Part 1

### The Book of Job: Session 9 Study Guide

#### Quiz

**Instructions:** Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. What is the setting of the scene in the Book of Job that is described in this session?
2. Who are the "sons of God" mentioned in the text, and what are they doing in this scene?
3. How is "hasatan" translated in English, and what is the significance of this term?
4. What are some examples, mentioned in the text, of beings other than the character in Job who take on the role of "satan"?
5. According to the text, how does the character of the Challenger act in the context of this scene?
6. Is the Challenger considered to be an evil figure in this Old Testament context? Why or why not?
7. How does the Challenger function in the book as it relates to God's actions?
8. According to the text, what is the purpose of the Challenger's role in the book of Job?
9. What does the text say about where later interpretations of the Challenger as the Devil are found?
10. How does focusing on the Challenger as a major character impact our understanding of the book of Job?

#### Quiz Answer Key

1. The setting is the heavenly court, where Yahweh is holding an audience with his divine council. The "sons of God" come before him to make their reports.
2. The "sons of God" are the council members of the divine court who assemble before God to give reports. They are not other gods but beings God has chosen to work with.

3. "Hasatan" is translated as "the satan" or "the challenger." It is not presented as a personal name but rather as a role, one who challenges or opposes.
4. The text mentions examples such as kings who challenge Solomon, a prosecuting attorney, and even the angel of the Lord who challenges Balaam.
5. The Challenger acts as God's agent, who challenges God's policies, specifically in this case regarding God's favor toward Job. He does not do so out of evil, but in order to test the nature of Job's righteousness.
6. The Challenger is not considered to be an evil figure. He functions as a neutral agent, carrying out his assigned role within the divine court, doing what it is his job to do.
7. The Challenger is acting as an agent of God, bringing challenges to God's policies. God accepts responsibility for Job's ruin and the Challenger acts only on God's behalf.
8. The Challenger's role is primarily to set the scene by questioning Job's motives and challenging God's policies. He is not presented as the explanation for suffering or evil in the book.
9. The text states that later interpretations of the Challenger as the Devil are found in pseudepigraphal literature, in the second temple period, and beyond the Old Testament, but not in the Old Testament itself.
10. Focusing on the Challenger as a major character distorts the message of the book by shifting the focus from God's actions and Job's righteousness to the role of a minor character.

### **Essay Questions**

**Instructions:** Write an essay in response to each of the following questions.

1. Explore the significance of the divine council in the Book of Job. How does this depiction of God's interaction with his council differ from other ancient Near Eastern mythologies?
2. Analyze the role of the Challenger in the book of Job. How does the author use this character to explore the nature of righteousness and suffering?
3. Compare and contrast the Old Testament portrayal of the "satan" with later New Testament understandings of the devil. How does the Old Testament character inform or challenge the later view?

4. Discuss the implications of considering the characters in the Book of Job as literary constructs. How does this perspective change our understanding of the book's message?
5. Assess the claim that the Challenger is a minor character. How would an overemphasis on this figure lead to a misinterpretation of the book's themes?

### Glossary of Key Terms

- **Yahweh:** The personal name of God in the Hebrew Bible.
- **Divine Council:** An assembly of heavenly beings, often referred to as the "sons of God," who meet with God to discuss matters of cosmic and earthly importance.
- **Hasatan:** The Hebrew term meaning "the satan" or "the challenger," referring to a role or function rather than a personal name in the Old Testament.
- **Challenger:** The term used in this session to refer to "hasatan," emphasizing the function of challenging or opposing.
- **Literary Construct:** A character or element in a narrative that is intentionally created by the author to convey a particular message or theme.
- **Pseudepigraphal Literature:** Writings of the Second Temple period and beyond that were often falsely attributed to biblical figures.
- **Omniscient:** Having complete or unlimited knowledge.
- **Agent:** A person or entity that carries out the actions or will of another.
- **Adversary:** One's opponent in a contest, conflict, or dispute.



## 5. FAQs on Walton, Job, Session 9, Scene in Heaven, Part 1, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

### FAQ on the Book of Job's Heavenly Scene and the Character of "ha-satan"

1. **What is the purpose of the heavenly scene in the Book of Job?** The heavenly scene in Job depicts God holding court with his divine council, a common portrayal of divine activity in the Old Testament. It is a setting where reports are given and decisions are made. In Job, this scene establishes the context for the challenges Job will face and underscores the fact that God ultimately controls the events. The scene introduces the character "ha-satan", the challenger, and lays the groundwork for God allowing Job to be tested.
2. **Who are the "sons of God" in the divine council, and what is their role?** The "sons of God" are members of God's divine council, a group of beings who assemble before God. They are not other gods but are beings that God has chosen to work with. They come before him to give reports and likely to participate in decision-making. It represents a way in which God chooses to execute his plans and interact with the world.
3. **Who is "ha-satan" in the Book of Job, and how is that different from the common understanding of Satan as the Devil?** In the Book of Job, "ha-satan" is not presented as a personal name or the devil but as a title, meaning "the challenger" or "the adversary." The Hebrew term *ha-satan* describes a function or role that involves opposing, challenging, or questioning. This function can be performed by both human and non-human beings, even by the angel of the Lord in other biblical passages. The *ha-satan* in Job is presented as a member of the divine council, acting as God's agent. This is different from the later, New Testament concept of Satan as a purely evil, rebellious figure.
4. **What is the *ha-satan's* role in the heavenly court, and what is the nature of his "challenge" in Job?** The *ha-satan*, or challenger, serves as an agent of God, carrying out a task. His challenge in Job is not aimed directly at Job, but is a questioning of God's policies. He argues that God's blessing of Job may be the sole reason for Job's righteousness and that a truly righteous person should be so regardless of the blessings they receive. This challenge leads to God permitting the testing of Job. The *ha-satan* is not portrayed as an evil tempter, liar, or corrupter, but as a neutral figure performing an assigned function.

5. **Is the *ha-satan* portrayed as evil in the Book of Job?** No, the *ha-satan* in the Book of Job is not portrayed as inherently evil. He is not a figure of diabolical intent or a source of temptation. He does not act independently of God but only on God's behalf. The author of the Book of Job does not emphasize a sense of delight or sympathy in any of the characters involved, neither God nor *ha-satan*, but rather in the larger story. The challenger is a neutral character doing what it is his job to do, without malice.
6. **How does the Book of Job depict God's responsibility in Job's suffering?** In the Book of Job, God takes full responsibility for the suffering inflicted upon Job. God even tells the *ha-satan* that he was incited to ruin Job. The narrative emphasizes that it is God who permits the suffering and allows the *ha-satan* to carry out the test. Job directly addresses God, holding him accountable for the calamity he has experienced, with no mention or attribution of his calamities to another entity. This directly points to God as the primary agent in these events.
7. **Why is it important to understand "ha-satan" within the original context of the Book of Job and not through later interpretations?** Understanding "ha-satan" within the original Israelite context is crucial because it differs significantly from the later, more developed concept of the devil found in post-Old Testament literature. The *ha-satan* is a literary construct, playing a role as a challenger in the divine court. Reading later ideas into the book distorts its meaning, leading to interpretations that the author likely never intended.
8. **What is the key message of the Book of Job regarding suffering and evil, and what role does the character of "ha-satan" play in that message?** The Book of Job does not present the challenger as the explanation for suffering or evil. The character's role is to raise questions about the nature of righteousness and divine justice. The real focus of the book is on exploring how suffering is a path that tests Job's righteousness and forces the characters and the audience to confront God and the purpose of righteousness. The character is a literary device, setting the scene for the central questions of faith and justice, and not the root of evil itself. Focusing on the *ha-satan* distracts from the book's more significant theological themes.