

The Book of Job

Session 9: Scene in Heaven, Part 1

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Abstract

In this session, Dr. John Walton transitions the narrative of the Book of Job from the earthly realm to the heavenly court, where Yahweh convenes His divine council. Walton meticulously analyzes the Hebrew word *hasatan*, demonstrating that it refers to a functional role of a challenger or adversary rather than a personal name for the devil. He argues that the Challenger acts as a neutral agent of God tasked with testing the integrity of God's policies, making him a minor character of little theological significance in explaining the cosmic origin of suffering. Ultimately, Walton emphasizes that suffering serves as the necessary path to test the true mettle of Job's righteousness.

Outline

I. Introduction to the Heavenly Council

- A. Setting the Scene
 - 1. The narrative transitions from Job's earthly household to Yahweh's heavenly court.
 - 2. Designated as an audience day where Yahweh holds court with His assembled council.
- B. The Divine Council (Sons of God)
 - 1. Consists of the "sons of God" who come before Yahweh to present their reports.
 - 2. Reports do not imply a lack of divine omniscience; rather, they reflect Yahweh's sovereign choice to work through a council.
 - 3. Paralleled in other biblical passages: 1 Kings 22, Isaiah 6 ("Who will go for us?"), and Psalm 82.
 - 4. Differs fundamentally from ancient Near Eastern polytheistic councils, as Yahweh is independent and requires no counselors.

II. Linguistic and Theological Analysis of the "Satan"

- A. The Definite Article in Hebrew
 - 1. The Hebrew text reads "*hasatan*" (the satan), utilizing the definite article "*ha*."
 - 2. This grammar demonstrates that the word is not a personal proper name for the devil.

- 3. Modern translations that capitalize the word as "Satan" inadvertently confuse a functional role with a personal name.
- B. The Hebrew Verb and Noun Meanings
 - 1. As a verb, "satan" means to oppose, challenge, stand in the way, or act as an adversary.
 - 2. This adversarial role is not intrinsically evil or sinister in the Old Testament.
 - 3. The role can be filled by human kings (adversaries to Solomon) or legal figures (prosecuting attorneys).
 - 4. Non-human agents, such as the Angel of the Lord in Numbers 22, can also perform the function of a "satan" by standing in someone's path.

III. The Role of the Challenger in the Old Testament

- A. Sparse Old Testament Occurrences
 - 1. The word is rarely used for non-human beings in the Old Testament, making it insufficient to build a detailed personal profile of the devil.
 - 2. Zechariah 3: hasatan opposes and challenges the restoration of the high priest, which is rebuked and resolved by God.
 - 3. 1 Chronicles 21: Satan incites David to conduct a census of Israel.
- B. Historical Development of the Concept
 - 1. "Satan" does not become a personal name for the devil until long after the Old Testament period.
 - 2. Second Temple period pseudepigraphal literature refers to "many satans," indicating the term remained fluid and pluralistic before designating a single devil figure.

IV. The Challenger as God's Agent in Job

- A. Subordinate Status
 - 1. The Challenger is a member of the sons of God, operating fully within the divine council.
 - 2. He acts as God's authorized agent, dispatched with specific tasks and returning to submit reports.
 - 3. He does not act independently, but does God's bidding and will.
- B. The Focus of the Challenge
 - 1. The Challenger's target is not Job's character, but God's policies of rewarding righteousness.
 - 2. The challenge is appropriate and logical: rewarding the righteous with benefits may subvert their motives, turning righteousness into a mercenary transaction.
 - 3. Job is brought into the discussion by God, not the Challenger, as the ultimate upright test case.

V. The Characterization of the Challenger

- A. Absence of Sinister Portrayals
 - 1. The text contains no diabolical laughing, tempting, possessing, lying, or corrupting of characters.

- 2. He is portrayed as a neutral heavenly functionary doing his assigned job.
- 3. He operates strictly under the power and limits set by God.
- B. Attribution of Responsibility
 - 1. God accepts full responsibility for Job's ruin, stating in chapter 2 that the Challenger incited Him to ruin Job.
 - 2. Throughout the book, no character ever suspects or blames an external devilish agent; everyone attributes the suffering directly to God.

VI. The Challenger as a Literary and Theological Construct

- A. A Character Designed for an Israelite Audience
 - 1. The Challenger is a literary character tailored to the theological understanding available to ancient Israelites.
 - 2. The book must be interpreted through this ancient Israelite lens rather than importing later New Testament or Greco-Roman profiles of the devil.
- B. Limited Theological Significance
 - 1. The Challenger is a minor character who quickly fades from the narrative after setting the scene.
 - 2. The book does not offer him as a scapegoat or explanation for human suffering.
 - 3. Focus must remain on the central issue: testing the mettle of Job's righteousness through the path of suffering.