

Dr. John Walton, Job, Session 9, 6-min. Video Overview

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Alright, let's jump right into this explainer. Today, we're stepping directly into Yahweh's ancient heavenly court to completely deconstruct one of the biggest, most common misconceptions in all of biblical literature. We're unmasking the challenger in the book of Job.

So here's the big, slightly jarring question we have to start with. Is the devil actually in the book of Job? Now, you know, when most modern readers open up this ancient text, they're fully expecting a red-horned villain prowling around causing absolute chaos. But the fascinating truth? The ancient Israelite audience saw something entirely different.

They absolutely were not reading a story about the devil we picture today. So who exactly is showing up in this story? Well, to figure that out, we have to understand the setting. We open up in the heavenly court on what is essentially audience day.

Yahweh's divine council, referred to as the sons of God, is all assembled. Think of it kind of like a royal court, or maybe a high-level corporate boardroom. Now, God obviously doesn't need their advice, but in the ancient worldview, this is simply how he chooses to govern.

He's choosing to take reports from this assembled council of functionaries. And right there among these sons of God who show up to report, we find a character that our English translations usually capitalize as Satan. But here is the major game-changing linguistic twist.

The original Hebrew text does not present this as a personal name at all. It uses a definite article. In Hebrew, that's the word *Ha*.

So the word is actually *Hasatan*. Because of that definite article, which literally translates to *The Satan*, it shouldn't even be capitalized in our Bibles. It's not a guy's name.

It's literally a job title. Okay, so if it's just a title and a role, what exactly is the function of a Satan? Well, as a Hebrew word, it can function as both a verb and a noun. It implies opposing someone, being an adversary, challenging a position, or — and this is a great way to think about it — acting much like a prosecuting attorney in a court setting.

There is absolutely nothing intrinsically evil about this word or this role. It just implies taking an adversarial stance. It's a completely necessary, standard function within a legal or royal framework.

What's truly wild is how frequently other Biblical figures step into this exact same adversarial role without being considered evil. I mean, human kings act as a Satan when they challenge King Solomon's rule. A prosecuting attorney takes on this role in a formal court setting.

Astonishingly, even the angel of the Lord acts as a Satan, an adversary, when blocking Balaam's path in the book of Numbers. The role itself is completely neutral. It entirely depends on what is actually being challenged.

So, we really need to separate what we've been taught from what the text is actually saying. You see, we're super used to the devil profile, a character who tempts, possesses, lies, and is just intrinsically evil. But Job gives us the challenger profile.

This challenger is a neutral, highly obedient functionary who simply questions policies. The character in Job completely lacks that malicious, sneaky profile we are so accustomed to seeing. In fact, to keep things clear, we should really just call him the challenger.

Because in this book, the challenger is clearly God's agent. He's been sent out with a specific task, he does God's bidding, and he returns to the heavenly council to report on what he found. He isn't crashing the party.

He isn't sneaking into heaven through the back door. He is entirely supposed to be there, functioning effectively as God's prosecuting attorney within that divine council. And this brings us to what the actual conflict is about, which is brilliant.

When the challenger speaks up, he is questioning God's policies, not Job himself. He asks a perfectly appropriate, highly logical question. If righteous people continuously receive benefits and rewards from God, doesn't that kind of subvert their righteousness? Do they just have an ulterior motive? It's a totally valid inquiry.

And notice, Job is simply brought up by God as the ultimate, logical test case for this policy review. Job is just a collateral test subject here, not the target of some personal vendetta. Scholar John Walton really hit the nail on the head with this.

He says, there's no diabolical chuckle as he ruins Job. That phrasing is so vivid, right? It reminds us that the challenger takes absolutely no evil delight in how this unfolds. He isn't corrupting, he isn't depraving, and he isn't tempting Job to sin.

He's just a neutral character executing his assigned job. And honestly, neither he nor God exhibits a particularly sympathetic response in the text. Which brings us to a massive, incredibly uncomfortable mystery.

If the challenger isn't some evil devil and is really just a neutral agent acting on orders without any diabolical intent, who is actually responsible for Job's ruin? Who holds the power and the accountability in this ancient story? Well, brace yourself, because the crucial point is right here in Job chapter 2. God himself says directly to the challenger, you have incited me to ruin him. God takes direct, explicit responsibility for ruining Job. He acknowledges that he gave the challenger a free hand, and God accepts the accountability for that.

Throughout the rest of the text, Job holds God responsible, and God is seen as responsible. No one in this ancient story ever imagines that some other rogue evil agent is at fault for what happened. To really wrap our minds around this, we have to remember that this book,

and this specific character of the challenger, is a literary construct designed for its original Israelite audience.

We have to read this through their ancient eyes using the cultural profile they actually had available to them at the time. We absolutely cannot retroactively apply a later Greco-Roman or New Testament theology to this character. If we do that, we fundamentally break the logic of the story they were trying to tell.

So how did we get here? Chronologically, it takes centuries for this concept to shift. During the Old Testament period, Hasatan was strictly used as a role or a title. Later on, in the Second Temple period, that time between the Testaments, literature began referencing many Satans.

It wasn't until well after the Old Testament era that this term eventually evolved and solidified into a personal name for the singular devil we tend to think of today. Because of all this, it really helps to realize that the challenger is, honestly, a minor character with very little theological significance in the book of Job itself. He's really just there to help set the scene.

If we obsess over him, trying to make him the ultimate source of evil, we completely and totally distort the actual message the ancient author was trying to convey to us. Okay, so what is the actual point of the drama? The book of Job is designed to test the absolute mettle of Job's righteousness. It uses suffering as the only valid, logical path to conduct that test, to see if Job serves God for nothing.

What it deliberately does not do is offer the challenger as a neat and tidy explanation for human suffering. The book is absolutely not suggesting that we ought to look for blame in some cartoonish villain whenever we experience pain. So I'll leave you with this.

If we read Job correctly and we realize we can no longer simply blame the devil for the suffering in this story, how does that reshape your understanding of God's sovereignty? It forces us to grapple with a God who takes responsibility. Take some time to really chew on that and let it change how you read this magnificent, challenging ancient text moving forward.