

# The Heavenly Council Above Job

## Introduction

### a. objectives

1. subject – The purpose of the heavenly council called to invite Satan to persecute Job
2. aim – To cause us to understand the reality of the purposes of God over all things, even Satan
3. passage – Job 1:6-12

### b. outline

1. The Context of the Heavenly Council
2. The Calling of the Heavenly Council
3. The Contention of the Heavenly Council

### c. opening

1. this sermon is an adaptation of one from my *Job* series (preached May 2023 - Jan 2024)
  - a. a sermon series *highly influential* over me and GFBC – particularly in how **John Calvin** viewed it

## I. The Context of the Heavenly Council

### Content

#### a. the context of the heavenly council

1. **context #1:** the inclusion of the “heavenly council” in our Bibles – *how did it get there?*
  - a. **question:** since the event occurs *without human witness*, how did *humans* know about it and include it in this writing (as in *other* events listed in Scripture that have no human witnesses):
    1. **e.g.** the first chapter of **Genesis** – no humans witnessed God create the heavens and the earth, nor form man from the dust of the ground – yet we accept the veracity of the story
  - b. **answer:** by **revelation**, either *directly* to the authors (Moses, Job, etc.), or through the *providential witness* of an oral tradition carrying the story down from an *earlier* revelation
    1. similar to the claim of Peter re: the development of Scripture *as a whole* (**2 Peter 1:21**)
      - a. **i.e.** men “*carried along*” by the Holy Spirit, whereby he “made known” (somehow!) what had happened, making sure that the story *remained faithful to the events themselves*
    2. it is *certainly reasonable* that Yahweh could have kept creation stories *accurately* passed down generation-to-generation within the framework of those mentioned in Scripture, until (under the *direct* inspiration of the Spirit) human authors wrote them down
    3. why we don’t need “video recordings” of the events of Scripture to know they are true
2. **context #2:** the reality of Satan at the “heavenly council” and his attack on Job – *who is he?*
  - a. **i.e.** against the backdrop of the fact that *so few* “moderns” accept his existence – the majority of *evangelicals* believe that Satan is nothing more than an “amalgamation” of evil (**i.e.** not a *personal* being, but the “idea” of evil *in total* throughout the human experience)
    1. **note:** the reason why *everything* has to be explained through a *naturalistic lens* – **e.g.** what was *once* considered to be demonic activity is now “rationalized” away to just mental illness
    2. **IOW:** a *biblical worldview* suggests that much of what is taking place around us is *far more* than just “problems of human existence” – it is *evil*, being *directly caused* by *evil beings*
  - b. **question:** who is this “*Satan*” (or “*Accuser*” or “*Adversary*”) as introduced in **1:6**? **answer:**
    1. he is an *angel*, part of a class of spiritual beings created *prior* to the formation of man
      - a. to a) serve as *messengers* of God; b) actively *carry out* God’s will in the world; or c) to be *observers* of what God has purposed to come to pass
    2. so, like other angels, he is a *personal* being (with intellect, will, emotion); he is a *created* being (thus limited); he is *ageless* and *immortal* (which gives him great *knowledge* and *cunning*); he is not bound by *physical space* (although “cast down” to earth in the Curse); he has no *gender* (although he is always referred to using *male* pronouns); he belongs to a *hierarchy* (including one he established for those who followed him); he can *manifest* himself in visible form when it suits him; and he is able to pass from the *physical world into the presence of God* in the “heavenly realm”
      - a. he *deceives* through numerous falsehoods (outright lies, blindness, subtle deceptions)
      - b. he *imitates good* in order to make evil appear good
      - c. he creates *counterfeits* to deceive and entrap (**e.g.** false gospels)
      - d. he uses *subtlety* to attack, especially at “weak spots” (**e.g.** Eve before the Tree)

- e. in the end: he is *ultimately* (as we will observe here) **a servant of God**
- 3. **context #3:** the nature of the “heavenly council” in light of human experience – **what is its purpose?**
  - a. is this a test of *Job* – is *Job* being tested, to see if he remains “*blameless and upright*” in the face of suffering (i.e. as in **1:1-5** identified as a man who “*feared God and turned away from evil*”)?
    - 1. **i.e.** the *off-assumed* intention of the book – how we are to face suffering *by faith*
    - 2. or, is this a test of *Satan* – is *Satan* being tested, to see if he will accept God’s intentions?
    - 3. **answer: neither** – certainly *Job*’s righteousness is being “tested” *within* the framework of God “testing” *Satan* to see if *he* is willing to accept reality, but ...
    - 4. **the “test” is not really a test** – it is **an affirmation of what is true** – God ordains the rebellion of *Satan* to prove what he has already established, and which cannot be shaken
    - 5. see ... the word “test” is *ambiguous* – while *Job*’s righteousness and *Satan*’s rebellion are both being “tested”, the entire event is *actually* a demonstration of the sovereignty of God – the “heavenly council” is actually called **to prove the trustworthiness of God’s decree**

## II. The Calling of the Heavenly Council

### Content

#### a. the calling of the heavenly council (1:6-7)

- 1. the *nature* of the heavenly council – a gathering of *spiritual beings* before the presence of God
  - a. the writer, *being human*, is “forced” to describe this event in *human* (anthropomorphic) terms
    - 1. **i.e.** because *we* are finite, physically-bound creatures, we are *only* able to understand events that occur *in the spiritual realm* in these kinds of terms
  - b. **IOW:** the *actual* substance of this event is *beyond our ability to describe* – *where* it took place and *how* it took place is only for us to *speculate* (e.g. “*day*” means *what?*)
- 2. the *players* in the heavenly council – a gathering of *spiritual beings* before the presence of God
  - a. “*sons of God*” = a euphemism for angelic (spiritual) beings
    - 1. the Hebrew conjunction (*bēn Elōhim*) first appears in **Genesis 6:2-4** – re: “beings” that found the daughters of men attractive, and had offspring with them
    - 2. the phrase appears again *only* in **Deut. 32:8**, **here**, **Job 38:7**, **Psalm 29:1**, and **Psalm 89:6**
      - a. the reference in **Job 38:7** (**i.e.** the “*sons of God shouted for joy*” when God laid the foundation of the earth) is *unambiguous*: the company of angels established by God at the very outset of *creation* to be the “audience” of his glory (chronologically before humans)
    - 3. the *obvious* conclusion **here** is that these are *spiritual beings* – angels who are called together before the presence of God, with *Satan* included amongst them (**i.e.** as an *angelic being*)
  - b. “*Satan*” (*sātān*) = (**as before**) an adversary; an accuser; **ITC:** a specific *individual* spiritual being, where *Satan* is used as his *name* (although it certainly represents his *character*)
    - 1. obviously ... it is *he* around which this historical-narrative pericope spins (**the point!**)
    - 2. in **v. 7**, *Satan*’s answer to God’s “question” tells us much about him:
      - a. “*going to and fro on the earth*” = his *abode* (realm) is this physical world (**Luke 10:18**)
      - b. **i.e.** the curse of **Genesis 3:14b** *banished* him out of the *heavenly realm* into the *physical*, cursing him to remain “fixed” to the “dust” *and the creatures that inhabit that dust*
      - c. **i.e.** *Satan*’s “domain” is no longer in the glorious presence of God, but here on a *fallen and corrupted* earth, forced to roam *it* until his judgment comes *as it comes to man* (**i.e.** death)
- 3. the *calling* of the heavenly council – a “presentation” of angels before God *for a specific purpose*
  - a. “*present themselves*” (*hityāssēb*) = to take a stand; to set oneself; to station oneself where called
    - 1. **i.e.** to come to *attention* before a superior, to be *inspected* (**Hab. 2:1**)  
*“I will take my stand at my watchpost and station myself on the tower, and look out to see what he will say to me, and what I will answer concerning my complaint.”*
  - b. **question:** are these “*sons of God*” the company of 1) *all* angels, 2) just *fallen* angels (with *Satan* among them), or 3) just the *elect* angels (with *Satan* *joining* them)?
    - 1. **answer:** if we consider the term *as used later by this same author* (**Job 38:7**), with a view of such *giving glory to God*, this would seem to indicate *elect* ones *with Satan invited too!*
  - c. **why:** why does God call the angels together *with Satan also coming amongst them*?
    - 1. it seems likely that this “heavenly council” is being called *specifically* for God to address *Satan* with the *elect* angels serving as *witnesses* to what will come of it ...

### III. The Contention of the Heavenly Council

#### Content

##### a. the contention of the heavenly council (1:8)

1. **thesis: the question God asks of Satan re: Job is the point of the entire book**
2. **the typical presupposition:** that **Job** is about *suffering*, and how we are to *respond* to it
  - a. thus, the *point* of the question is simply to ask Satan if he is **familiar** with Job – to “introduce” Job to Satan *so that* God’s “intention” for Job to suffer (and respond rightly to it!) can be accomplished
    1. but, Satan *is already familiar with Job* – his responses in **vv. 9-11** clearly point out the Satan is *aware* of the man – he knows *much* about Job, including what **he** believes Job is “all about”
    2. and, Satan *could have* made Job suffer during his “walking up and down” on the earth – it is *highly unlikely* that every suffering Satan inflicts is preceded by a “council” with God
  - b. **in fact:** the question *itself* makes *little* sense if you assume this book is about suffering ...
3. **the better presupposition:** that **Job** is about the *absolute nature* of what God *himself* establishes
  - a. that Job **is** who he **is because God has decreed it to be so**, and **nothing** can be done (by Satan, or anyone else) to change that reality – **i.e.** God’s sovereignty is not “theoretical”
    1. **this is not an observation by God, it is a declaration by God ...**
  - b. thus, the *point* of the question is to ask Satan *if he understands who Job really is*, and *why*
    1. God *describes* Job’s *spiritual state* using the same language as **v. 1** – he *describes (to Satan!)* the *nature* of Job, as though he says “do you *really* know who Job is ... ?”
    2. **IMO:** many “pass over” this description *as though it is not germane to the discussion*
    3. but ... there **must** be a reason why God *explicitly* describes Job’s *spiritual state* in **ontological** terms (**i.e.** describing *who he is* and *what he does as a result*) ...
  - c. **IOW:** God asks the question to *provoke* a response in the “heavenly council”:
    1. the *elect* angels would get the point: **Job is who he is because God has spoken it**, therefore it is fixed and cannot be changed (certainly not by us!!) – thus, **no one else speaks!**
    2. Satan, however, **misses the point entirely** (and **he speaks**) ...

##### b. the response of Satan at the heavenly council (1:9-11)

1. **thesis: the question Satan asks of God re: Job underscores the point of the entire book**
  - a. Satan’s question asserts this: the *only* reason that Job is righteous *is because you bless him* (**i.e.** the “no reason” is a rhetorical assertion that *there is a reason*)
  - b. **note:** like those for whom he is “father” (the reprobate; **John 8:44**), Satan’s blindness, rage, and rebellion against God **prevents him from seeing what is true in the purposes of God**
    1. he does not *get the point* God is making – Satan *asserts* that Job is only righteous because has received *much physical blessing from God* (**i.e.** “put a hedge around him”)
  - c. **Satan misses the point** – he *assumes* that the “only” reason a man can be considered righteous (by God!) *is in the way he behaves*, his *inward* nature determined by his *outward actions*
    1. **BTW:** the *common fallacy* of fallen humanity: what we are *inwardly* is determined what we do *outwardly* (**i.e.** religion: I am a sinner because I sin vs. Bible: I sin because I am a sinner)
    2. thus his **test of God:** “stretch out your hand and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face” = remove the blessings, and **who he really is will show through** ...

##### c. the test of Satan ordained at the heavenly council (1:12)

1. God **ordains** for Satan to use his evil abilities against Job ... **why:** why does God *allow* (**command?**) Satan to attack Job’s material well-being?
2. **answer:** to demonstrate that what God has established in Job *cannot be shaken* by a change in his *outward reality* – **Job is righteous because God has declared it to be so**
  - a. Job’s righteousness is a function of what God has *spoken into existence*, what God has formed *from his own breath* (**e.g.** like the very *creatures* Satan so deeply despises)
  - b. **the righteousness of the believer is not a function of his outward action** (**i.e.** his religion, ritual, morality, etc.), **but of the express declaration of God, a justification**
  - c. **what has been spoken cannot be “unspoken”** – what God has spoken to be true cannot be nullified by Satan, by our “shortcomings”, or by anything else in creation