

JOB



*Biblical Commentary
Through Dialogue*

KYLE WOODRUFF

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*For Carl Jung, who sparked my interest
in traveling this road.*

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JOB 1

THE DIVINE WAGER

*Very well, then, everything he
has is in your power.
—Job 1:12*

The old man sat at their usual table in the park, soaking in the early summer warmth as it trickled through the trees. The oak leaves danced and swayed in the wind as their shadows flickered on the board. He pushed up his jacket sleeve to check his watch and then looked down the path again. With no sign of the boy in sight, he chose to remove his jacket and fold it neatly on the bench beside him.

The rhythmic footsteps of a jogger echoed around the bend, and he glanced in that direction. Their eyes met when she came into view, so the man offered a friendly wave. The woman returned it with a smile as she passed, and the man's eyes followed her as she disappeared down the path.

When she was nearly out of sight, she maneuvered to the side to give a wide berth to another figure on the path. A large

smile grew upon the old man's face as he recognized the boy's uneven gait when a heavy backpack was slung over his shoulder.

The figure of the boy grew larger as he approached in a hurried shuffle. Once he was within earshot, the man raised his hand and said, "Well look who decided to show u—"

"Who goes running?" said the boy. "Psychos."

The man squeezed his eyes shut as he laughed.

The boy plopped down in a disgruntled mood and said, "Sorry I'm late." He heaved his bag off his shoulder and onto the side of the table as he slapped a hand on top of it. "I had to go *shopping* this morning."

"I see that," said the man, sliding his Bible out from underneath the bag. "Looks like a good one."

"Yeah, well, my other one got stolen," said the boy, removing his own jacket and dropping it into a crumpled pile on the ground. "How was *your* week?"

"You know," said the man, "just the usual hustle and bustle of retiremen—"

"All my school stuff was in it," said the boy, dumping his bag on the ground next to his coat. "Who steals *books* anyway? I really hate people sometimes."

"Well," said the man, glancing down toward the dirt that had surely left its first mark on the bag, "sometimes misfortune comes to those who don't deserve it."

"Straight to the philosophy," said the boy, mulling over the chessboard before moving a pawn. "I just don't understand why

stuff like that happens, ya know? I try to be a good person, I try to do the right thing. What did I do to deserve this?”

“That, my boy, is something mankind has pondered over since the beginning of time.” The old man moved his own pawn forward, saying, “You know, there’s a story in the Bible that seeks to answer that very question.”

“There is?” said the boy, his eyes lighting up as he jumped another pawn forward. “When do we get there?”

“There is,” said the man, “and it’s one of my favorites. Something I believe to be a neglected treasure of the Bible.” He opened the book and began flipping to the relevant page. “And we can skip right to it if you’d like.”

“Oh yeah?”

“Sure,” said the man. “The Bible doesn’t have to be read in order. In fact, it’s really a library of different books written by different authors anyway. The order in which they appear wasn’t even necessarily the order they were written.”

“Well, then what are we waiting for?” said the boy, offering an open palm toward the pages.

The old man smiled as he ran a hand along the pages, smoothing them out while he cleared his throat. “This story concerns a man from the land of Uz named Job. But before we dive in, I’d like to set the tone by sharing the meaning of his name. Depending on the source, I’ve come across things like ‘one persecuted,’ or ‘repentance,’ or ‘greatly tried.’”

“I’m guessing that’ll make sense as the story unfolds?” said the boy.

“Indeed it shall,” said the man, looking toward the board and jumping his knight into the mix. “On the surface, Job’s state of affairs leaves the reader heartbroken and confused. He’s a pathetic study in tragedy really, and his story shows how difficult life can be. But while most of us can face the reality that our existence is punctuated with heartaches and headaches, Job’s story nags at how life can be unfair. Not unlike the way you’re feeling about your backpack right now, am I wrong?”

“No,” said the boy, “you’re not.”

“Mhm. And it’s the unfairness that taps into something that makes it nearly impossible to accept, am I right?”

“Yeah,” said the boy, “you are.”

“Mhm,” said the man. “A desire for justice is seeded deep within us, which is why I suggest you pay close attention to everything we’re about to read. Job’s story may be God’s way of preparing us for some of the same things Job endured, because you never know what the Lord will do next.”

“Alright,” said the boy, “you have my attention.”

“Let’s begin then,” said the man. “Our brother Job is described as ‘blameless’ and ‘upright,’ a man who fears God and shuns evil. This doesn’t mean he was perfect, but rather that he had integrity. What he says with his lips, he lived in whole-body worship. Keep that in mind as we read.”

The boy tapped his temple with a finger.

With a nod, the old man continued. “We’re told Job had seven sons and three daughters. This big, happy family of Job’s is all grown up, living in homes nearby. There are no diapers to change, no baths to give, no shuffling his kids off to school or teenaged daughters to worry over. That’s all behind Mr. and Mrs. Job now. He’s got it made, able to focus on business, which we learn about here. We’re told he owned seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, a thousand head of cattle, and five hundred donkeys, as well as many servants, making Job the richest man in the East.”

“Must be nice,” said the boy.

“Yes, well, it’s important to note that his character is mentioned before his wealth, and for good reason. That said, there’s no doubt the man was living in the lap of luxury. This number of sheep and cattle suggests a potential for major trade in wool and livestock. And the number of camels and donkeys implies transportation for the abundance of crops he could produce on his land. Job was a businessman the size of John D. Rockefeller in his day, and his life was at its peak. But as we’ll soon find out, the accumulation of wealth never made him waver from his devotion to God, as it does with others, at least so far as we can tell. This is what the introduction of this book is trying to portray.”

“Alright,” said the boy, a hint of skepticism in his voice.

“We’re told Job’s ten children would host feasts in their homes to celebrate birthdays. And although Job was healthy, wealthy, and godly, he was never out of touch with his worship.

So whenever he heard his children had thrown a party, he would always offer a sacrifice on their behalf the next morning, in case they had gotten carried away in their celebration and ‘cursed God in their hearts,’ as it says here, or done something frowned upon. Job was ever concerned with the high priority of keeping himself and his family aligned with the good graces of the Lord.”

“Seems a little strange,” said the boy. “If Job was so righteous, wouldn’t he have raised his children to be the same?”

“Very good,” said the man. “Of course he would have. My guess is that Job had a special reason for his concern. As a man of wealth himself, he understood that when people need spiritual help the most is when things are going well. Times of stress and trial drive us into the arms of the Lord, but it’s during times of prosperity and celebration that we tend to drift away from God. Job demonstrates a keen insight into human psychology that we can take with us here. And so this act completes the image of our brother Job, not only as a good and godly man himself, but as a loving father to all his children as well.”

“Well, that’s wonderful,” said the boy. “I feel better about my backpack already.”

The man rolled his eyes.

“I assume you’re going somewhere with this?” said the boy.

“Indeed I am,” said the man. “Here we have our shining example of virtue, showered with blessings. What a happy beginning to our little story, am I right?”

The boy’s eyes narrowed. “Mhmm.”

The man looked down at his Bible and said, “This is where things get interesting,” before he read aloud:

One day the angels came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came with them.¹

The boy furrowed his brow. “I assume this takes place in some kind of heavenly boardroom? And just so I know, is this the first time Satan is formally introduced in the Bible, or did we skip over that part?”

“Yes, very good,” said the man. “We’re transported from Earth to an image of angelic beings taking their seats in a divine cabinet meeting of sorts. This visual helps us to recognize that we live in a world in which unseen spiritual powers are at work behind the scenes, one of whom is Satan. And to answer your question, we know from the book of Revelation that the serpent cast out of the garden of Eden was Satan as well, so this would make it his second appearance in the Bible, but this is the first time he’s named.”

“Gotcha,” said the boy. “So there’s some kind of holy conference gathering and a snake comes slithering up to join them.”

“Well, there’s no description of the form Satan takes in this story here. In the reference to Revelation I just mentioned, it tells us Satan and *his angels* were thrown out of Heaven and cast down to the earth, so from this we can assume he’s some kind of

spiritual being like the angels are here. But whatever form they're taking in this gathering is left to our imaginations."

"How come there's no mention of that in Genesis?"

"No mention of what?"

"Angels being cast out of Heaven. There's no mention of the snake being an angel, and there's no mention of other angels being kicked out of paradise. Where is the author of Revelation getting that from? Also, didn't you just say this was a collection of different books written by different authors in different times?"

"I did, yes," said the man. "And as the title implies, the book was a *revelation*, from God."

"Okay, but how do we know the serpent there and Satan here are even the same character if they were created by different authors who never knew each other?"

"Well, they weren't *created*," said the man, "these are recorded historical events."

"Right. Sure. But who..." The boy began to speak but then he rubbed the bridge of his nose with a sigh. "Never mind. Let's not get into that again. Let's just read the story for what it is."

"Fine with me," said the man.

"So what's this meeting all about anyway?" said the boy.

"Well, the purpose of the meeting is never explicitly shared. I suppose the poetic notion is that these gatherings were held periodically to observe the conduct of mortal beings, but that

assumption comes from the questions God asks Satan here,” said the man, looking down to his Bible:

The Lord said to Satan, “From where have you come?”

Satan answered the Lord and said, “From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it.”

And the Lord said to Satan, “Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?”²

The old man looked up from his Bible again. “First, let me just point out that the title ‘my servant’ is a mark of great honor, indicating a special closeness to God, as used in the Bible for the likes of Abraham, Moses, and other prophets. Second, while some may think that Satan is bound in Hell, consigned to some underground cave-like furnace, it’s not true. We learn here about the restless nature of evil, roaming the earth as it pleases. Third, this scene was written in part to reveal the relationship between the good Lord and the evil Satan. It appears that the earthly affairs of men are the subject of unseen counsels in the divine world, but how this wicked spirit slithered his way into this holy counsel is beyond me. Pardon my pun.”

“I’m not understanding how these cross-references are being made, though,” said the boy. “If the Bible isn’t a chronological series of books where one author is making callbacks to his own work, how are you attributing the snake’s actions in the garden to this guy here in a standalone story? For all we know, the book of Job was written before the story in Eden, with a different

character in mind. That's like slapping the story of *Sleeping Beauty* together with the movie *Shrek* just because they both have dragons."

"The difference," said the man, "is that those are fairy tales and the Bible was written, edited, and compiled under the guiding force of divine inspiration. That's the only explanation for how these woven characters, ideas, and concepts can accurately come together, even with different authorship at different points in history. Because *God* is the author."

There was a silent pause as the boy gave a nod.

"We have a cohesive understanding of the biblical canon put together by scholars throughout the ages," said the man. "What's most relevant to our story here, though, is that the name Satan means something like 'accuser' or 'adversary,' two roles we'll see him live up to as he answers God here." The man looked down to his Bible and read again:

"Does Job fear God for nothing? Have You not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land. But now stretch out Your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse You to Your face."³

"So we can see here," said the man, "even after the Lord displays His servant in opposition to Satan, Satan lives up to his name by disturbing this holy counsel with an accusatory view of the faithful subject."

“Yeah, yeah. Job is great,” said the boy. “We get it. But when it comes to Satan, being an accuser might just be his *role*, like you said. ‘Satan’ might just be the title this particular angel has, like ‘Accountant’ or ‘Policeman.’ A divine Accountant’s role is to keep track of the financial books. A Satan’s role might be to patrol the earth and look for people acting out against God, like some kind of ticket cop who writes up parking violations. Sure, nobody likes a ticket cop, but they’re really just doing their job. Satan seems more like an extra pair of eyes and ears for God as he roams the earth, watching people and reporting any wrongdoing. I think God is just going around the room like, ‘Thank you, Mr. Accountant. Sounds like the Holy Treasury is in order. And you, Mr. Satan? What does your department have to report this quarter?’”

The man stared on with a look of inquisitive concern while the boy continued.

“And so Satan goes, ‘Oh, you know, the usual. Just patrolling the streets and such.’ Which God knows really means just spending a lot of time in donut shops or whatever. So He asks if Satan has considered Job, just to make sure Satan is paying attention, ya know? So Satan clears his throat and sits up a little straighter in his seat. ‘Right, right, Job. The rich guy. Um, of course I have. But God, haven’t You blessed him to the point where he’s keen to follow Your rules? He’s a celebrity now. He doesn’t wanna screw that up with all the wealth You’ve given him. What do You say we run a little experiment? See if he’s just a fair-weather follower or not. Know what I’m saying?’”

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