

ABSTRACT

This article reconsiders the role of the Satan in the prologue of the Book of Job in light of the traditional interpretation, which sees this figure as a real adversary with ontological depth. While modern scholarship often portrays him as a neutral or subordinate celestial figure, such readings may rest on assumptions not fully grounded in the text. Through close textual, narrative and theological analysis, the study proposes that Satan plays a central role in a cosmic conflict, acting as an accuser who tests the integrity of the righteous and raises implicit questions about divine justice. By situating the prologue within wisdom literature and the broader biblical canon, the article seeks to contribute to a deeper theological reading of this complex figure.

Keywords: Satan, Job, traditional interpretation, cosmic conflict, divine justice, Bible, adversary.

RESUMEN

Este artículo reconsidera el papel de Satanás en el prólogo del libro de Job a la luz de la interpretación tradicional, la cual ve a esta figura como un verdadero adversario con una profundidad ontológica real. Mientras que la exégesis moderna suele retratarlo como una figura celestial neutral o subordinada, tales lecturas pueden basarse en supuestos no plenamente fundamentados en el texto. A través de un análisis textual, narrativo y teológico minucioso, el estudio propone que Satanás desempeña un papel central en un conflicto cósmico, actuando como acusador que pone a prueba la integridad del justo y plantea preguntas implícitas sobre la justicia divina. Al situar el prólogo dentro de la literatura sapiencial y del canon bíblico en general, el artículo busca contribuir a una lectura teológica más profunda de esta compleja figura.

Palabras clave: Satanás, Job, interpretación tradicional, conflicto cósmico, justicia divina, Biblia, adversario.

THE PROFILE OF THE SATAN IN THE PROLOGUE OF JOB: TRACES IN FAVOR OF TRADITIONAL INTERPRETATION

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Introduction

The idyllic portrait of Job's life—marked by happiness, peace, and prosperity—presented by the narrator at the beginning of the book is abruptly disrupted by a change in scene, which serves to introduce the narrative proper. This is the first of two episodes commonly referred to in German scholarship as *Satanstücke* (“Satan passages”)¹, since it is here that the Satan (Heb. שָׂטָן)—“the adversary”—enters the stage as the central dramatic figure. These sections provide a heavenly perspective inaccessible to Job himself but essential for the reader to grasp the unfolding events and to understand the debates that will emerge throughout the book.

The profile of the Satan that emerges in the prologue of the book of Job has been interpreted in very different ways throughout history. The first major line of interpretation - which we will call here the “traditional interpretation” - identifies this character as an evil celestial being, compatible with the figure of a fallen angel, rebellious against God and associated with the introduction of sin into the universe.² From this perspective, Job's Satan would already be a manifestation of this being who will later be identified as the Devil or Satan.

This interpretation has been upheld, with variations, by numerous Church Fathers, medieval Jewish commentators and Christian exegetes over the centuries. Although the text of Job does not explicitly mention a previous fall nor does it call him a demon, many have read in his actions an essential hostility towards God and the human being, consistent with the later characterization of Satan in texts such as Zechariah 3, Revelation 12 or the New Testament in general. In contrast to this position, a second line—which we will call the “modern

1. Gianfranco Ravasi, *Giobbe: traduzione e commento* 3rd ed. (Rome: Borla, 1991), 282.

2. See for instance: Jeffrey Burton Russell, *The Devil: Perceptions of Evil from Antiquity to Primitive Christianity* (Ithaca, NY – London: Cornell University Press, 1977); *The Prince of Darkness: Radical Evil and the Power of Good in History* (Ithaca, NY – London: Cornell University Press, 1992); Gregory A. Boyd, *Satan and the Problem of Evil: Constructing a Trinitarian Warfare Theodicy* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 2001), 39-49.

interpretation”—adopts a more skeptical perspective regarding any demonic character in Job’s Satan. For this reading, it would be a mythological or functional figure, inserted into an archaic scheme of celestial court. His role would be that of a prosecutor or public accuser, in charge of testing human fidelity as part of his duties before God.³ He would not be an enemy of God, but a subordinate who fulfills a function in the divine order. This interpretation has gained strength in contemporary critical exegesis, which tends to dissociate Job’s Satan from the eschatological Satan, arguing that the demonological development of this figure occurs only in later periods of Judaism.⁴

3. Cf. William Caldwell, “The Doctrine of Satan. I. In The Old Testament,” *BW* 41 (1913): 32; Charles J. Ball, *The Book of Job*, ed. rev. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1922), 103; Rivkah Scharf Kluger, *Satan in the Old Testament*, tras. by Hildegard Nagel (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1967), 51-52, 118; Jean Lévêque, *Job et son Dieu: essai d'exégèse et de théologie biblique*, 2 vols. (Études Bibliques; Paris: Librairie Lecoffre, J. Gabalda, 1970), 1:182; Robert Gordis, *The Book of Job: Commentary, New Translation and Special Studies* (Mosheret Series 2; New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1978), 14-15; Volkmar Hirth, “Der Geist’ in I Reg 22,” *ZAW* 101 (1989): 113-114; Marvin H. Pope, *Job* (AB 15; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1973), 9-10; Ravasi, *Giobbe*, 290; Norman C. Habel, *The Book of Job: A Commentary* (OTL; Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1985), 89; Luis Alonso Schökel & José Luis Sicre, *Job: Comentario teológico y literario* (2nd ed.; Madrid: Cristiandad, 2002), 126; J. Severino Croatto, “El libro de Job como clave hermenéutica de la teología,” *RevB* 43 (1981): 37; Víctor Morla, *Libro de Job: Recóndita armonía* (Estella, Navarra: Verbo Divino, 2017), 98-99; Julio Trebelle Barrera & Susana Pottecher, *Job* (Colección Estructuras y procesos. Serie Religión; Madrid: Trotta, 2011), 11, n. 2; T. J. Wray & Gregory Mobley, *The Birth of Satan: Tracing the Devil’s Biblical Roots* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 63-64; Carol A. Newsom, *The Book of Job. A Contest of Moral Imaginations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 55.

4. See, for example: August Dillmann, *Hiob*, 4th ed. (KEHAT; Leipzig: Verlag Von S. Hirzel, 1891), 7-8; Bernhard Duhm, *Das Buch Hiob* (KHC 16; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1897), 7-8; Edmond Jacob, *Teología del Antiguo Testamento* (Madrid: Marova, 1969), 71-73; Paul Van Imschoot, *Teología del Antiguo Testamento* (Madrid: Fax, 1969), 181-188. Using the classification made by Ravasi (*Giobbe*, 295), it is possible to group the hypotheses on the possible origin of this figure into four: (1) Babylonian hypothesis: it would be an adaptation of the personal protector and accuser god attributed to every man by the Mesopotamian theological conception; (2) Persian hypothesis: the figure of the Satan could derive from the secret service of Persia, a police service called “the eyes and ears of the king”. To this day, the most widespread one was proposed by Tur-Sinai (*The Book of Job*, 38-45); and developed by Adolph L. Oppenheim (“The Eyes of the Lord,” *JAOS* 88 [1968]: 173-180); and is supported, among others, by Pope, *Job*, 10; Habel, *The Book of Job*, 89; John Gray, *The Book of Job* (Text of the Hebrew Bible 1; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2010), 127; Choon-Leong Seow, *Job 1-21: Interpretation and Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013), 274; Morla, *Libro de Job*, 98; (3) psychoanalytic hypothesis: the Satan would be only

It has also been pointed out that Satan's initial attitude is not that of an opponent; on the contrary, he presents himself peacefully, like the other sons of God and offers his angelic services. His later attitude is attributed to the fact that he was challenged or provoked by God himself in a kind of wager.⁵ Hence, from a psychoanalytic point of view, the Satan is seen as a split from YHWH, and referred to as the *opus alienum* of God,⁶ a hypostasis of the deity,⁷ "the hidden face of Yahweh," his *alter ego*, or the "demonic in Yahweh."⁸ However, as Wilson rightly notes, none of the scholars who attempt to see in the Satan the dark side of God himself demonstrate this from the text of Job's prologue.⁹

The present article sets out to critically reassess the dichotomy described above and to evaluate whether the text of Job's prologue supports a recovery—albeit measured—of the traditional interpretation. Rather than defending this view on dogmatic grounds, the aim is to examine whether the narrative elements, vocabulary, and canonical echoes suggest a figure that transcends mere literary function. In this regard, the article refers to the Satan of Job as a character with ontological depth—that is, a personal and active being whose existence is presumed within the theological world of the text and whose role aligns with later portrayals of Satan as adversary and accuser. Particular attention is given to how the prologue reflects a cosmic conflict, in which the integrity of the righteous and the justice of God are tested. While open to literary and historical insights, the approach prioritizes a close reading of the text itself, seeking to trace thematic and theological continuity within the biblical canon.

a split from God himself to speak of his evil side; (4) Hebrew hypothesis: the model must be found in the Bible itself and more specifically in Jewish law. The Satan would be nothing more than the celestial equivalent of the public prosecutor or the civil party lawyer who has the function of reporting crimes and supporting the accusation during the trial.

5. Croatto, "El libro de Job como clave hermenéutica de la teología," 37; Morla, *Libro de Job*, 99, 741; Jesús Asurmendi, *Job. Experiencia del mal, experiencia de Dios* (Estella, Navarra: Verbo Divino, 2001), 21-23.

6. Habel, *The Book of Job*, 89, 91.

7. Meir Weiss, *The Story of Job's Beginning. Job 1-2: A Literary Analysis* (Jerusalem: Humanities, 1983), 38-39; Seow, *Job 1-21*, 273-274.

8. Trebelle & Pottecher, *Job*, 134, 152; Paul Volz, *Das Dämonische in Jobwe* (SGV 110; Tübingen: Mohr, 1924); Jeffrey Burton Russell, *The Devil: Perceptions of Evil from Antiquity to Primitive Christianity* (Ithaca, NY – London: Cornell University Press, 1977), 174-220; Wray and Mobley, *The Birth of Satan*, 27-50.

9. Lindsay Wilson, *Job* (THOTC; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), 32.

The Satan at the first heavenly council meeting (Job 1:6-12)

Heavenly Council

The beginning of the narration itself starts with the expression יְהִי הַיּוֹם (1:6) “and the day came to pass”, “and the day came when”).¹⁰ It is debated whether the phrase is rather unspecific¹¹ or alludes to a specific day, highlighting the determination of הַיּוֹם.¹² In Job 1 and 2, several of the changes of setting are introduced by the construction יְהִי הַיּוֹם which implies both a change of time and a change of setting (1:6, 13; 2:1). The two moments in the heavenly realm begin with the arrival of the sons of God before the Lord and culminate with the departure of Satan from their presence (1:12; 2:7). From the point of view of discourse analysis, this sentence marks the beginning of degree zero of the narrative. After the above marker, it reads: 1:6) וַיָּבֹאוּ בְנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים; “and the sons of God came”). The expression “sons of God” (בְּנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים)¹³

10. That this sentence introduces the narrative was already noted by: Duhm, *Das Buch Hiob*, 6; Alviero Niccacci, *Sintaxis del hebreo bíblico* (IEB 8; Estella, Navarra: Verbo Divino, 2002), 111.

11. V says *quadam autem die* (“one day”) in 1:6 and *factum est autem cum quadam die* (“it happened another day”) in 2:1. Among the commentators who go in this direction: Duhm, *Das Buch Hiob*, 6; Édouard Dhorme, *A Commentary on the Book of Job* (trans. by H. Knight; Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1984), 5; Robert Gordis, *The Book of Job: Commentary, New Translation and Special Studies* (Mosheret Series 2; New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1978), 13; Alonso & Sicre, *Job*, 120; Seow, *Job 1-21*, 271; Morla, *Libro de Job*, 94.

12. G translates καὶ ὡς ἐγένετο ἡ ἡμέρα (“and when the day came”) γ ἐγένετο δὲ ὡς ἡ ἡμέρα αὐτῆ (“but when the day came”) respectively, implying that these are specific days. S translates according to the TM וַיָּבֹאוּ בְנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים (“and the day came to pass”). T goes a step further and interprets that the first council met on the first day of the year and the second on the day of atonement. His translation וְהָיָה יוֹם דִּינָא (“and the day of judgment came to pass at the beginning of the year”; 1:6) וְהָיָה יוֹם דִּינָא רַבָּא יוֹם שְׂבוּק טוֹרְוֹנָיָא (“and the day of great judgment came to pass, even the day of the remission of sins”). In favor of a specific day: Raši, “Rashi on Job 1:6”, *Sefaria*; Abraham Ibn Ezra, *El comentario de Abraham Ibn Ezra al libro de Job* (critical edition, translation and introductory study by Mariano Gómez Aranda; Madrid: CSIC, 2004), 12; Dillmann, *Hiob*, 8; Charles J. Ball, *The Book of Job* (ed. rev.; Oxford: Clarendon, 1922), 101; Otto Zöckler, “The Book of Job. Theologically and Homiletically Expounded”, in *Commentary on the Holy Scriptures. Critical, Doctrinal and Homiletical* (ed. by John Peter Lange, trans. from German and ed. by Philip Schaff; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1976), 54; Naftali H. Tur-Sinai, *The Book of Job: A New Commentary* (Jerusalem: Kiryath Sepher, 1957), 8; Pope, *Job*, 9; Habel, *The Book of Job*, 88-89; Gray, *The Book of Job*, 125.

13. While V (*fili Dei*), S (בְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים) and Aquila (οἱ υἱοὶ τοῦ θεοῦ) keep the

does not refer to “gods” or “divine beings” in a polytheistic sense,¹⁴ but rather to heavenly beings created by God—commonly understood as angels. This interpretation is supported by Job 38:7, where the same term appears in a poetic parallelism with morning stars, referring to celestial beings rejoicing at the creation of the world, thus implying their preexistence to the earth.¹⁵ Furthermore, Ps 148:1–5 presents a hierarchically ordered cosmos in which angels (מלאכים) and other heavenly hosts are clearly portrayed as created entities subject to God’s command. The alternative expression בני אלים (“sons of the mighty”) in Psalms 29:1 and 89:7 reinforces this understanding, as it appears in liturgical or doxological contexts where these beings give glory to YHWH — not as rivals, but as subordinate worshippers. The singular Aramaic form בר־אלהין (“son of the gods”) in Daniel 3:25 is also used to describe a divine figure perceived as angelic by Nebuchadnezzar. The expression בני האלהים also appears in Genesis 6:2, 4, a passage that has given rise to a variety of interpretations. While some propose a celestial reading here as well, it is more likely that the term in this case does not refer to heavenly beings.¹⁶ Nonetheless, in the broader canonical context בני האלהים is consistently used to denote celestial beings subordinate to God, as the prologue of Job exemplifies. Taken together, these instances suggest that בני האלהים consistently refers to created, obedient celestial beings within the monotheistic framework of biblical theology. The image of God presiding over a heavenly assembly appears repeatedly in both the Old and New Testaments,¹⁷ and has been recognized as one of

expression “sons of God”, G identifies them as *οἱ ἄγγελοι τοῦ θεοῦ* (“God’s angels”; 1:6 y 2:1). Likewise, T reads בני מלאכיא (“the sons of the angels”) in 1:6 and כתי מלאכיא (“the hosts of angels”) in 2:1.

14. This is proposed, for example, by: Ball, *The Book of Job*, 101; Tur-Sinai, *The Book of Job*, 10; Pope, *Job*, 9; Seow, *Job 1–21*, 271–272.

15. Weiss, *The Story of Job’s Beginning*, 32–33; Robert Moses, “‘The *satan*’ in Light of the Creation Theology of Job”, *HBT* 34 (2012): 24; Merling Alomía, “Lesser Gods of the Ancient Near East and Some Comparisons with Heavenly Being of the Old Testament” (Ph.D. diss., Andrews University, 1987), 544.

16. An ancient tradition has identified these characters with a group of angels who became corrupted by marrying human women (“daughters of men”). However, the context of the passage also allows these groups to be interpreted as two lines of descendants of Adam and Eve. Cf. Reinaldo W. Siqueira, “Os ‘Filhos de Deus’ em Gênesis 6:1–4”, *Ker* 1 (2005): 37–47; Donn W. Leatherman, “Who were the ‘sons of God’ and the ‘daughters of men’? Genesis 6:4”, in *Interpreting Scripture: Bible Questions and Answers* (ed. by Gerhard Pfandl; Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2010), 135–137.

17. Cf. for example 1 Kgs 22:19; 2 Chr 18:18–22; Ps 29:1–3; 82:1; 89:5–7; Isa

the central cosmological symbols of the Hebrew Bible.¹⁸

Many scholars have associated this imagery with depictions of divine assemblies found in the religious traditions of the Ancient Near East. Specifically, it has been interpreted as a remnant of an ancient polytheistic worldview, rooted in a primitive stage of Israelite religion and linked to Mesopotamian and Canaanite mythologies.¹⁹ However, to demonstrate this evolutionary process of the religion of ancient Israel, and to corroborate that it simply took and adapted its cosmological understanding from the surrounding cultures, is not something that can be sustained on complete and solid data. Nor can it adequately explain the characteristic and unique features of Israelite cosmology. Entering a detailed discussion of this matter is beyond the scope of this paper, so we will simply briefly consider the data that emerge from the biblical image of the celestial council.

In the wider corpus of Ancient Near Eastern literature, the assembly of gods was without exception a polytheistic entity for the Mesopotamians, Hittites, and Canaanites—explicitly so in Ugaritic texts.²⁰ For their part, all the biblical images of the heavenly council are strictly monotheistic, and the book of Job is no exception.²¹ They are images of the celestial sphere where God is the only Creator and sovereign King of the universe, and to him are allied his creatures, celestial beings who exercise free will.

Alomia identifies three conspicuous characteristics of the heavenly assembly in the OT: (1) it is an organized and dynamic body under the absolute leadership of YHWH, more properly it is the assembly of YHWH; (2) it is composed of God and his angels, who are not

6:1-13; 24:21-23; Jer 23:18.22; Ezek 1-3; Dan 7:9-10; Zech 3:1-7; Heb 1; Rev 4; 5; 7.

18. Patrick D. Miller, "Cosmology and World Order in the Old Testament: The Divine Council as Cosmic-Political Symbol," *HBT* 9 (1987): 54.

19. See: Ball, *The Book of Job*, 101 ("...is probably a fossilized relic of primitive Semitic polytheism"); H. Wheeler Robinson, "The Council of Yahweh," *JTS* 45 (1944): 151-157; Roland de Vaux, *Historia antigua de Israel I: Desde los orígenes a la entrada en Canaán* (Madrid: Cristiandad, 1975), 436; Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (1973; 9^a reimp., Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 186-190; Pope, *Job*, 9; Norbert Lohfink, "Gott und die Götter im Alten Testament", *TA* 6 (1969): 50-71; E. Theodore Mullen, *The Assembly of the Gods: The Divine Council in Canaanite and Early Hebrew Literature* (HSM 24; Chico, CA: Scholars, 1980); Habel, *The Book of Job*, 89; John Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan* (JSOTSS 265; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002); Gray, *The Book of Job*, 126; Trebolle & Pottecher, *Job*, 11, n. 2.

20. Alomía, "Lesser Gods of the Ancient Near East...", 544.

21. Hartley, *The Book of Job*, 71 n. 6.

gods, but created beings; and (3) the membership of the angels is immeasurable.²² As for functions, this author highlights three as the most important: (1) to present different types of information before God, presumably of matters related to his vast domain; (2) to pay homage and praise to God, in this case, the heavenly assembly functions as a heavenly choir, jubilantly praising the wonders of YHWH, who at the same time acknowledges the praise given; (3) to assist YHWH in his judgment.²³ All biblical imagery points to judgment as the most important function of the heavenly council. This is evident, for instance, in scenes such as 1 Kgs 22:19–23, Ps 82, Dan 7:9–10, Zech 3 and Job 1–2, where deliberation, accusation, and verdict are central elements of the divine assembly. In this context the heavenly beings are presented as those who possess some governing authority with respect to what happens on earth.²⁴ They participate in the deliberations and have a say in how things are done.²⁵ For this reason, some scholars argue that the primary responsibility of the celestial assembly is the preservation of cosmic order.²⁶ However, that possible authority or involvement in human affairs remains fully subordinate to the supreme authority of YHWH. Since elsewhere in the Bible the image of the heavenly court is associated with the heavenly sanctuary (Dan 7; Rev 4-5; among others), this setting may be understood, within the framework of the cosmic conflict, as the central locus of God's salvific activity.²⁷ As Celis aptly observes, the heavenly sanctuary in the bible is the center of all divine activity—not only for the universe as a whole but for this fallen world in particular.²⁸

22. Alomía, “Lesser Gods of the Ancient Near East...”, 558.

23. Alomía, “Lesser Gods of the Ancient Near East...”, 558.

24. John C. Peckham, “Cognitive Dissonance and Cosmic Conflict: a Rules-of-Engagement Framework for Thinking about Prayer, Providence, and Evil,” *AUSS* 57 (2020): 363.

25. Gregory A. Boyd, *God at War: The Bible & Spiritual Conflict* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 1997), 130.

26. Miller, “Cosmology and World Order in the Old Testament”, 70.

27. Sergio Celis C., “Divine Governance and Judgment in History and in the Context of the Seventh-day Adventist Perspective of the Cosmic Conflict” (Ph.D. diss., Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies, 2017), 232.

28. Celis, *Divine Governance and Judgment*, 234. Cf. Elias Brasil de Souza, *The Heavenly Sanctuary/Temple Motif in the Hebrew Bible: Function and Relationship to the Earthly Counterparts* (ATSDS 7; Berrien Springs, MI: Adventist Theological Society, 2005).

First sign of conflict

The sentence 1:6) (להתיצב על-יהוה) seems to suggest that the meeting of the celestial council is motivated by some kind of conflict involving its participants. This phrase is also repeated two other times in 2:1²⁹ may introduce the notion of conflict, depending on how this is translated and interpreted. The root יצב, that occurs exclusively in the *hitpaal* form, has the primary meaning of “take up a position”, “take one’s stand”.³⁰ It is the context that is responsible for defining whether this posture is one of good disposition and service or of struggle and resistance. Regarding the verb יצב in Job 1:6, most scholars have understood it to express the idea of appearing before a king to render services as a courtier, as seen in Zech 6:5 and Prov 22:29.³¹ The unusual preference of על over לפני has been understood as a possible Late Hebrew feature.³² However, the semantic range of the root יצב also includes the meaning of “resist” or “opposition”.³³ This nuance of “resist” is perceived in the use of the same verb form in Num 22:22; Deut 7:24; 9:2; Josh 1:5; Ps 2:2 and 2 Chr 20:6. The reference in Ps 2:2 is interesting because in it the kings of the earth “take their stand” (ייתיצבו); in a clear context of rebellion and conspiracy) “against YHWH” (על-יהוה) and “against

29. Although the second repetition of 2:1 is absent in G, it appears marked with an asterisk in several textual testimonies and it is present in V (*et staret in conspectu eius*), T (למקום בדינא קדם יי) and S (לחמנת סוג מו-ל). Thus, it does not seem necessary to infer that this is a non-original duplicate. Its absence in G may be due to the desire to provide uniformity in relation to 1:6.

30. Elmer A. Martens, “יצב”, *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis (NIDOTTE)*, 5 vols., ed. by Willem A. Van Gemeren (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), 2:500; J. Reindl, “נצב/יצב”, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, 17 vols., ed. by G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren and Heinz-Josef Fabry (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 9:524-525.

31. Cf. Ernst F. C. Rosenmüller, *Scholia in Vetus Testamentum in Compendium Redacta, vol. IV: Scholia in Jobum* (Lipsiae: J. A. Barth, 1832), 27; Dillmann, *Hiob*, 9; Ball, *The Book of Job*, 102; Duhm, *Das Buch Hiob*, 6-7; Tur-Sinai, *The Book of Job*, 11; Dhorme, *A Commentary on the Book of Job*, 5; Georg Forher, *Das Buch Hiob* (KAT; Stuttgart: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1963), 81; Pope, *Job*, 9; Habel, *The Book of Job*, 89; Ravasi, *Giobbe*, 293; Gray, *The Book of Job*, 126; Seow, *Job 1-21*, 272.

32. Avi Hurvitz, “The Date of the Prose Tale of Job Linguistically Reconsidered,” *HTR* 67 (1974): 25-26; Ian Young, “Is the Prose Tale of Job in Late Biblical Hebrew?,” *VT* 59 (2009): 614-615.

33. Cf. William L. Holladay, *CHALOT* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980), “יצב”; Luis Alonso Schökel, *Diccionario bíblico hebreo-español* (Valencia: Institución San Jerónimo, 1990), “יצב” (includes the nuance but does not apply it to Job 1:6 and 2:1).

his anointed” (ועל-משיחו).³⁴ In Num 22:22 it is mentioned that the Angel of Yhwh “opposed” (ויתיצב) Balaam as “adversary” (שטן).

It is likely that this reading is behind the translation of T למקום יי בדינא קדם (“to appear or stand in judgment before YHWH”). With this sense, Raši also interprets the passage when he states that they came “to oppose God, to fight with him”.³⁵ Gordis claims this sense for 2:2 although he opts for the former at 1:6.³⁶ However, the use of the preposition על (which includes the nuance of “against”)³⁷ and the emphatic mention of the adversary could be in favor of the second reading in all cases. It could even be a polyvalent use of the root יצב, that is, while it denotes the action of presenting oneself, it also connotes that such action is in terms of opposition or resistance. This usage could also be observed in 41:2 [41:10] when God is speaking about the Leviathan and says: ומי הוא לפני יתיצב (“Who is he who plants himself before me?”), in a clear reference to the hostile attitude toward God of the creature.

That the council meets twice and the problem persists may indicate an intensification of resistance. This is clearly evidenced by the double repetition of the phrase in 2:1, one of which explicitly labels Satan, possibly pointing to him as the leader of this resistance or opposition. The main implication of this reading is that what motivates the council meeting is a questioning of God himself by some of its members, a questioning for which the Satan becomes the spokesperson. In other words, the heavenly council is, in some way, involved in the conflict. This seems to be the underlying context of the ensuing debate between God and the Satan. Importantly, this reading does not imply that all the “sons of God” are in direct rebellion against YHWH, but rather that the heavenly council as a whole is drawn into a cosmic inquiry, with the Satan acting as its most explicit and confrontational voice. God’s

34. Cf. Victor Sasson, “The Language of Rebellion in Psalm 2 and in the Plaster Texts from Deir Alla,” *AUSS* 24, n.° 2 (1986): 147-154. Considering the comparison, the author characterizes the rebellion in Ps 2 as *universal* rebellion and that in the Deir ‘Alla texts as *cosmic* rebellion.

35. Raši, “Rashi on Job 1:6,” *Sefaria*.

36. Gordis, *The Book of Job*, 14, 19.

37. The meaning of the phrase על-ייהוה is divided into two main nuances: (1) “against the Lord” (Exod 16:7,8; Num 16:11; 26:9; 27:3; Deut 13:6; 2 Kgs 17:9; 2 Chr 32:16; Ps 2:2; Jer 29:32; 48:26,42; Nah 1:11); or (2) “in/to the Lord” (1 Sam 1:10; 2 Chr 13:18; 15:4; 16:7,8; 30:9; Ps 18:42; 37:4,5; 55:23; 146:5; Prov 28:25; Isa 10:20; 56:6; 58:14). To express the idea of “presenting oneself before YHWH” one would rather expect the phrase להתיצב לפני-יהוה. Cf. Morla, *Libro de Job*, 94.

responses, then, are not addressed to the Satan alone, but to the broader assembly who witnesses—or even participates in—this confrontation.

The entry of the Satan as a discordant note

The entry of the Satan introduces a discordant or provocative voice within the council, not because the other members are openly rebellious, but because his challenge crystallizes a latent tension present in the assembly. He verbalizes a suspicion or question that demands a divine answer.

That the heavenly council is assembled in the context of a cosmic conflict seems to be corroborated by the phrase: **ויבוא גם־השטן בתוכם** (1:6; “...and the Satan also came among them”). It is said that among the sons of God there was also a being called “the Satan” or “the adversary” (**השטן**). The root **שטן** occurs 33 times in the OT, 14 of which occur in the prologue of Job in allusion to this character (Job 1:6, 7, 8, 9, 12; 2:1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7). As a noun in its basic sense it refers to any person or being who is conceived as an “adversary”, “opponent”, “rival” or “enemy” (1 Sam 29:4; 2 Sam 19:23; 1 Kgs 5:18; 11:14, 23, 25), and in a judicial context it probably alludes to the figure of an “accuser” or “prosecutor”.³⁸ Even the Angel of YHWH who opposed Balaam as his “adversary” (Num 22:22,32). The rest of the occurrences may allude to the same character in Job (1 Chr 21:1; Ps 109:6; Zech 3:1,2). On the other hand, the verbal form, only used in the Psalter (Ps 38:21; 109:4, 20, 29), indicates the action of “accusing, denouncing, opposing, attacking”.³⁹ For Ryan Stokes **שטן** describes more of an “attacker” or “executioner,” highlighting a more violent nature of the character.⁴⁰ Some also link the name to the root **שטם** (“to persecute”, “to have a grudge against or harbor animosity toward” someone).⁴¹ As mentioned in the introduction, there is a debate among scholars as to the origin, identity, and function of the Satan in Job and whether it is possible to link him with the NT Satan. Since the definite article is not usually added to proper names, a considerable number of scholars believe that **השטן** is not the name of

38. Alonso, *Diccionario bíblico hebreo-español*, “שטן”.

39. Alonso, *Diccionario bíblico hebreo-español*, “שטן”.

40. Ryan E. Stokes, “Satan, YHWH’s Executioner,” *JBL* 133 (2014): 251-270.

41. This root occurs only 6 times in the entire OT: Gen 27:41; 49:23; 50:15; Job 16:9; 30:21 and Ps 55:4. It is in turn linked to the noun **משטמה** (“hostility”; Hos 9:8). On some of the discussions surrounding the etymology of **שטן** see Rivkah Scharf Kluger, *Satan in the Old Testament* (trans. by Hildegard Nagel; Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1967), 25-34.

this being but rather describes an office or function.⁴² In such a case, it would be a divinely commissioned prosecutor whose mission would be to inspect men and defend God's interests. In turn, a certain consensus among scholars has established that the figure of the Satan as an evil being is introduced in Judaism as a late element, basically after the Babylonian exile. In relation to the presence or absence of the article, it is worth saying that this alone cannot define whether the character can be linked to the Satan of the NT. It could only give us an indication about the time of writing, that is, a period when it was not yet a proper name.⁴³ On the other hand, the presence of the article in combination with a common noun could also be explained as a formula equivalent to a proper name.⁴⁴ It could also be understood that in a certain sense *השטן* is not in principle the name of the character, but may be both the role and the nickname or sobriquet of someone in particular earned because of his attitude contrary to God. It does not indicate who he is, but what he is.⁴⁵

It is very probable that with time this appellative became the main designation to name the enemy of God, as is evident in the form without article of 1 Chr 21:1. So this change or transition must have taken place at the time of the composition of the OT itself. This was later clearly attested in intertestamental and NT literature. On the other hand, the fact that *שטן* can be used as an everyday term does not

42. Jean Lévêque, *Job et son Dieu: essai d'exégèse et de théologie biblique* (2 vols.; Études Bibliques; Paris: Librairie Lecoffre, J. Gabalda, 1970), 1:179-182. For Ball, the presence of the article should be considered a peculiar use of it that should be translated indefinitely in our language (*The Book of Job*, 103).

43. Young, "Is the Prose Tale of Job in Late Biblical Hebrew?", 611-612; John Peckham, *Theodicy of Love: Cosmic Conflict and the Problem of Evil* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018), 78. And this even in a relative way, since intertestamental books of Qumran do not use Satan as a proper name.

44. Bruce K. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 249-250 (§ 13.6.a b): "Sometimes, through usage, the article not only points out a particular person or thing, but it also elevates it to such a position of uniqueness that the *noun + article* combination becomes the equivalent of a proper name". Cf. Dominic Zappia, "Demythologizing the Satan Tradition of Historical-Criticism: A Reevaluation of the Old Testament Portrait of *השטן* in Light of the Old Testament Pseudepigrapha," *SJOT* 29 (2015): 120-121 ("The use of an article has no bearing on whether a noun is or is not a personal name. In fact, throughout the OT individuals are made definite at times and left indefinite at others").

45. Victor P. Hamilton, *Handbook on the Pentateuch*, 2^o ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 40.

exclude the possibility that its use points to the Satan as the adversary par excellence.⁴⁶

With regard to the metaphor of the Satan as a prosecutor, which is widespread among biblical commentators, Caesar has rightly pointed out that: “The notion of the Satan as public prosecutor in Job is an anachronism deserving more widespread caution than widespread application”.⁴⁷ It so happens that other studies have shown that there was no role approaching that of a public prosecutor either in Israel or among other neighboring and contemporary peoples whose culture and literature might have been as influential on that of Israel.⁴⁸ Therefore, the title and the role of “Satan” must be interpreted from the meaning that the context requires, and in Job it is clearly not that of a prosecutor.⁴⁹ On the other hand, it must be recognized that in Job the figure of the Satan is complex.⁵⁰

On the notion that the designation of the Satan as the Evil One is a post-exilic development, Dahood already posited in light of Ps 109:6 that this should be revisited.⁵¹ Curiously, as Caesar rightly points out, “Sixth and Fifth century B.C. biblical books, however, provide the strongest challenge to the theory of Zoroastrian influence because the ones expected to show the most influence are the ones that lack evidence of any such influence”.⁵² In this line of reexamination, the work of Dominic Zappia proves to be especially significant. He reviews the critical consensus and, in our view convincingly, shows that the authors of the Old Testament portrayed the Satan from his very first appearance as an individual antagonist rather than as a role temporarily assumed by a member of the heavenly court.⁵³

46. Alomía, “Lesser Gods of the Ancient Near East...,” 507-508.

47. Lael O. Caesar, “Character in Job” (Ph.D. diss., The University of Wisconsin, 1991), 69.

48. Caesar cites the following works: Adolphe Lods, “Les origines de la figure de Satan”, in *Melanges syriens offerts a Monsieur Rene Dussaud* (vol. 2; Paris: Geuthner, 1939), 649-660; Peggy Lynne Day, *An Adversary in Heaven: Satan in the Hebrew Bible* (HSM 43, ed. por Frank Moore Cross; Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1988), 13.

49. Caesar, “Character in Job”, 70.

50. Caesar (“Character in Job”, 70-71). He states: “The Satan of Job is *sui generis*, a bold and brilliant scoundrel, an independent and hardheaded cynic”.

51. Michell Dahood, *Psalms III 101-150* (AB; Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1970), 101-102.

52. Lael O. Caesar, “Job,” in *Andrews Bible Commentary*, ed. Ángel Manuel Rodríguez (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2020), 625.

53. Zappia, “Demythologizing the Satan Tradition of Historical-Criticism”, 117-134.

The following analysis supports the view that the OT already contains all the essential features of the Satan depicted in the NT: (1) it is the designation given to a supernatural being who acts in the heavenly and earthly realm (Job 1-2; Zech 3:1);⁵⁴ (2) he is opposed to God (Job 1-2; Zech 3:1-2);⁵⁵ (3) he is an evil enemy and accuser of human beings (Job 1-2; Zech 3:1-2; Ps 109:6);⁵⁶ (4) he is a usurper ruler of this world (as Job 1:7 and 2:2 seem to suggest);⁵⁷ and (5) he acts as a deceiver, tempter, or instigator of evil (1 Chr 21:1), capable of using natural and human agents to accomplish his purposes (Job 1:13-19; 2:7).⁵⁸ Thus, the NT does not present a radically different character, but rather develops or makes explicit other details, such as that Satan is the initiator of sin (John 8:44; 1 John 3:8), that it was he who tempted Eve as the “serpent of old” (Rev 12:9; 20:2; 2 Cor 11:3) and that he has control over death (Heb 2:14), among other things. There are sufficient arguments to affirm then that the Satan of Job can be identified with the same Satan of the NT.⁵⁹ Some scholars who acknowledge this connection suggest that the figure in Job may represent a being in the process of becoming the Evil One or the Satan of later tradition.⁶⁰ I would argue, however, that this role is already clearly defined in Job, as indicated by several details—discussed below—that portray him as a malevolent being. The mere presence of this personage in the heavenly assembly does not necessarily indicate that he is a loyal servant of God, a benign accuser and that he acts only in the way he has been designated. Particularly in the book of Job, Satan is clearly portrayed with a gloomy character,⁶¹

54. Luke 10:18; 2 Cor 11:14; Rev 12:9.

55. Matt 13:39; Rom 16:20; Jude 9; Rev 12:7; 13:10.

56. Luke 22:31; Acts 10:38; 2 Cor 2:11; Eph 6:11; 2 Tim 2:26; 1 Thess 2:18; Jas 4:7; 1 Pet 5:8; Rev 12:10.

57. Matt 12:24-29; Luke 4:5-6; 11:18; John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; Acts 26:18; 2 Cor 4:4; Eph 2:2; Col 1:13; 1 John 5:19; Rev 2:13.

58. Matt 4:1-11; 16:23; Mark 1:13; 4:15; Luke 4:1-13; 8:12; 13:16; 22:3; John 8:44; 13:2, 27; Acts 5:3; 1 Cor 7:5; 2 Cor 11:3; 12:7; 2 Thess 2:9; 1 Tim 3:7; 5:15; Rev 2:9-10; 2:24; 3:9; 12:9; 20:10.

59. So too Henry Cowles, *The Book of Job, with notes, critical explanatory, and practical* (New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1877), 4-5.

60. Cf. Moses, “‘The *satan*’ in Light of the Creation Theology of Job”, 19-34; Wilson, *Job*, 32; John C. L. Gibson, “On Evil in the Book of Job” in *Ascribe to the Lord. Biblical & other studies in memory of Peter C. Craigie* (ed. Lyle Eslinger y Glen Taylor, JSOTSS 67; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1988), 418.

61. Cf. Ball, *The Book of Job*, 103-104; Samuel Terrien, “The Book of Job,” in *The Interpreter’s Bible* (ed. by George A. Buttrick, et. al., vol. 3; New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1954), 912.

and neither is he a benign opponent in Zechariah,⁶² where he is also commended to divine judgment (3:2).

In some way, the role of the Satan character offers subtle hints about the possible backdrop of the story. It is precisely with his appearance that the drama begins. The book of Job does not suggest that this being assumes the role of prosecutor by divine commission—as if it were part of God’s design—but rather introduces him into the heavenly council already bearing the title “adversary.” This designation presupposes some prior conflict that led to his being called by that name. Although the book of Job does not elaborate on this background, it leaves room for such a presupposition to arise naturally.

The use of the preposition בְּתוֹכָם (“in the midst of them,” “among them”) in Job 1:6 indicates a relationship of likeness and kinship with the other sons of God (cf. Gen 23:10 and 1 Sam 10:10),⁶³ in other words, the Satan is an angel or a heavenly being who integrates the heavenly council.⁶⁴ On the other hand, this preposition is often used to designate a notable member of a group.⁶⁵ All this fits well with the traditional idea that the Satan was initially a perfect and prominent angel who later rebelled (Isa 14:12-14; Ezek 28:11-19; Rev 12).⁶⁶ Hence the Hebrew text employs the particle גַּם (“also”),⁶⁷ suggesting some irregularity with his presence. Some understand that the use of the preposition only draws attention to the adversary because of his role within the narrative.⁶⁸ However, it seems rather to point out that he

62. Mark J. Boda, *The Book of Zechariah* (NICOT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016), 230, n. 29; George L. Klein, *Zechariah* (NAC; Nashville, TN: B&H, 2008), 134-136.

63. Duhm, *Das Buch Hiob*, 7; Jacob, *Teología del Antiguo Testamento*, 72; Stephen J. Vicchio, *The Book of Job: A History of Interpretation and a Commentary* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2020), 51.

64. Ibn Ezra, *El comentario de Abraham Ibn Ezra al libro de Job*, 12.

65. Vicchio, *The Book of Job*, 51. For example, in Gen 23:10 it is used to highlight the figure of Ephron among (בְּתוֹךְ) the sons of Heth and in 42:5 the figure of the sons of Israel among (בְּתוֹךְ) those who went to Egypt to look for food. Other examples could be Gen 18:24, 26; 40:20; Num 1:49; 2:17; 3:12; 4:2, 18; 8:6; among many others.

66. Although these OT texts are often challenged when discussing this topic, Bertoluci has demonstrated their validity (“The Son of the Morning and the Guardian Cherub in the Context of the Controversy between Good and Evil” [Ph.D. diss., Andrews University, 1985]).

67. G does not reproduce it, but it is present in Aquila (καίγϵ), V (*etiam*), T (ⲉⲁ) and S (ⲁⲙ).

68. Seow, *Job 1-21*, 272.

is not conceived of as a full member of this group, but as an intruder.⁶⁹ He is not considered a “son of God”, he is simply “among them”, that is, with them but not of them.⁷⁰ Otherness is also highlighted by the spatial fact that the Satan is the only one who arrives and leaves God’s presence.⁷¹ Thus, his visit is no longer seen as natural, and his entrance is marked as a discordant note.

All of this seems to suggest that we are not dealing with someone in the early stages of rebellion, as if this were the beginning of his antagonism. Rather, he appears as someone who has already defined himself as an adversary and whose character has already been morally perverted.

A Dialogue Already in Progress: Tracing the Implied Backstory in Job 1–2

God initiates the dialogue with a question—not out of ignorance, but as a summons for a subordinate creature to account for his actions.⁷² The Satan responds directly, without much protocol or polite language: 1:7) *משוט בארץ ומהתהלך בה* (“...to compass the earth and to go about it”). The mention of Satan’s origin is striking. The text does not specify where the other sons of God come from, but it clearly states that he comes from the earth (*בארץ*),⁷³ a detail reiterated in 2:2. There, he is said to be engaged in a continuous activity, though the nature of this task

69. Ball, *The Book of Job*, 103; Hamilton, *Handbook on the Pentateuch*, 40; Alomía, “Lesser Gods of the Ancient Near East...”, 509; Caesar, “Character in Job”, 76-77; Edwin Thiele and Margaret Thiele, *Job and the Devil* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1988), 28; Jiří Moskala, “The God of Job and Our Adversary”, *JATS* 15 (2004): 105; Agustín Giménez González, “La persecución de Satán a Job (Job 1-2)”, in *Palabra, Sacramento y Derecho. Homenaje al Cardenal Antonio M.º Rouco Varela* (ed. by Manuel Aroztegi Esnaola; Madrid: Universidad San Dámaso, 2014), 362; Zappia, “Demythologizing the Satan Tradition of Historical-Criticism”, 127.

70. Samuel Terrien, “The Book of Job”, in *The Interpreter’s Bible* (ed. by George A. Buttrick, et. al., vol. 3; New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1954), 912; Eric Ortlund, *Piercing Leviathan: God’s defeat of Evil in the Book of Job* (NSBT; Downers Grove, IL: Apollos, IVP Academic, 2021), 13.

71. Caesar, “Character in Job”, 77-78.

72. C. J. Williams, *The Shadow of Christ in the Book of Job* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2017), 32.

73. G translates *περιελθὼν τὴν γῆν καὶ ἐμπεριπατήσας τὴν ὑπ’ οὐρανὸν πάρειμι* (“I have come, after going around the earth and walking through what is under the heaven”). For Morla the expression *τὴν ὑπ’ οὐρανὸν* can be understood as an apposition of the previous *τὴν γῆν* (*Libro de Job*, 95, n. 69).

is not specified. The verb *משוטט* (מִשׁוֹטֵט in 2:2)⁷⁴ may offer a clue, as this “roaming” or “going to and from”—often associated with searching—can suggest the idea of “inspecting” (cf. Jer 5:1; Zech 4:10; Ps 14:2),⁷⁵ implicitly directed toward human beings.⁷⁶ Thus interprets T by adding the gloss *ולמבדק בעובדי בני-אנשא* (“and to examine the works of the sons of men,” also present in 2:2). This is an activity that elsewhere in the OT is attributed to God himself (2Chr 16:9; Zech 4:10).⁷⁷

The verb *מהתהלך* (constructive state participle in the *hithpael* of *הלך*) belongs to a group of cases where the *hithpael* expresses a durative sense rather than that of a reflexive or reciprocal action.⁷⁸ Thus, *ומהתהלך בה* would be “and of walking through it back and forth,” “and of being walking through it,” “and of going through it.”⁷⁹

The Satan’s provenance and the tone of his response could indicate that he considers the earth as his place, perhaps his rightful domain.⁸⁰ In this sense, it would give the impression that he attends the celestial council as if he were a representative or ruler or reciprocal action. Thus, *ומהתהלך בה* would be “and of walking through it back and forth,” “and of being walking through it,” “and of going through it.” of this world.⁸¹ It connects in some way with the oldest Judeo-Christian tradition

74. This verb seems to create a pun with *השטן*. Pope, *Job*, 11.

75. Nuance already suggested by Fray Luis de León, *Exposición del libro de Job* (Buenos Aires: Hyspamérica, 1985), 26. It is also followed by Alonso & Sicre, *Job*, 125-126. Against, Gordis, *The Book of Job*, 15.

76. Perhaps an echo of this characterization can be found in 1 Pet 5:8: “...your adversary the Devil, as a roaring lion, prowls about seeking someone to devour.”

77. *כי יהוה עיני משטטות בכל-הארץ* (“for the eyes of YHWH run to and from throughout the whole earth”; 2 Chr 16,9); *שבעה-אלה עיני יהוה המה משוטטים בכל-הארץ* (“These seven are the eyes of YHWH that range throughout the earth”; Zc 4,10). These references suggest not only an idea of inspection, but also of protection and care. For Morla these parallels offer an indication of the high position occupied by Satan among the sons of God (*Libro de Job*, 95, n. 68). For Seow they corroborate that Satan represents a projection of the divine presence (*Job 1-21*, 274). But they could also suggest the idea of usurpation of a divine prerogative.

78. Ephraim A. Speiser, “The Durative *Hithpa’el*: A tan-Form,” *JAOS* 75 (1955): 118-121. This same meaning could be seen for this verb in various conjugations, for example, in Gen 5:24 (*ויתהלך*; *wayyiqtol*); Gen 48:15 (*התהלכו*; *qatal*); Lev 26:12 (*והתהלכת*; *wegatal*); Deut 23:14 (*מתהלך*; infinitive construct); 2 Sam 7:6 (*מתהלך*; infinitive construct); Zech 6:7 (*התהלכו*; imperative; *y wwayyiqtol*).

79. The translation of G (aorist active participle *ἐμπεριπατήσας*; “walking”) also contemplates this nuance.

80. This idea of “possession” was already noted by de León, *Exposición del libro de Job*, 26.

81. Thiele & Thiele, *Job and the Devil*, 28-29; Peckham, *Theodicy of Love*, 74.

around the idea of a rebellious angel who was expelled from heaven and confined to earth (Isa 14:12; Ezek 28:16; Luke 10:18; Rev 12:7-9), which he then claims as his possession.⁸² Although Satan's response is vague, it clearly portrays him as actively operating within the world. The tone of his reply also suggests a certain boastfulness—an assertion of his freedom to roam the earth.

God introduces the subject of the heavenly council with a question addressed directly to the Satan, one that already carries a tone of confrontation: 1:8 *השמת לבך על-עבדי איוב כי אין כמהו בארץ*; "... have you fixed your mind against my servant Job, because there is none like him on the earth?"). The opening phrase, *השמת לבך* (literally "have you set your heart..."), implies more than mere attention or perception; it suggests a prolonged deliberation or intentional focus, leading to a defined stance. What is particularly noteworthy is the use of the preposition *על* in the expression *על-עבדי איוב*. If the intent were simply to express that Job was the object of Satan's attention, we might expect *אל*⁸³ or *ל* instead (as in Exod 9:21; 1 Sam 9:20; Job 34:14; Ezek 40:4). Two interpretive options are possible:

(1) To set the heart "upon" or "toward" Job. This is the sense of the preposition whenever the object is the heart (*על-לב שים*; "lay on the heart"; Isa 42:25; 47:7; 57:1; Jer 12:11; Dan 1:8; Mal 2:2). Only twice is it said: "set the heart upon..." (Hag 1:5 and 7), but the object is not a person, but the ways themselves. This value is also seen in the similar formula *על עיני על שים +* ("set one's eyes upon"; Gen 44:21; Jer 24:6; 39:12). Most translators and commentators understand the phrase according to this value of the preposition.

(2) To set the heart "against" Job. Only in 1 Sam 25:25 is the formula *שים + לב על* followed a complement *על +* person, and in this case the sense of the preposition is clearly adversarial (*על-נבל*; "against Nabal"). This adversarial nuance is also seen in the expression *שים פניך על* ("set your face against"; Ezek 29:2; 35:2).⁸⁴ This understanding is further supported by the G, which renders the phrase in Job 1:8 with

82. This is reflected in the NT designations of "prince of this world" (*ὁ ἄρχων τοῦ κόσμου τούτου*; Jn 12,31), "spirit of this world" (*τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ κόσμου*; 1 Cor 2,12) or "god of this world" (*ὁ θεὸς τοῦ αἰῶνος*; 2 Cor 4,4), who in turn shows himself as the owner of all the kingdoms of the earth (Matt 4,8-9; Lk 4,5-7).

83. Tur-Sinai, *The Book of Job*, 11; Gray, *The Book of Job*, 121, 127 (who supports the idea of replacing *על* with *אל*).

84. This expression, although similar, is more emphatic than *שים פניך אל* ("put your face towards"; Ezek 6:2; 13:17).

κατὰ + genitive (“against”), reinforcing the interpretation of renders the phrase in Job 1:8 with κατὰ + genitive (“against”), reinforcing the interpretation deliberate opposition.⁸⁵

This interpretive choice also considers the broader biblical usage of the expression לֵב שִׁים (“to set the heart”), particularly in Wisdom Literature. There, it denotes focused attention, reflection, or deliberate contemplation, often associated with moral or spiritual insight (cf. Prov 22:17; Eccl 7:2; 8:9). Although these occurrences are generally neutral or positive, the phrase can take on a hostile nuance depending on the context and syntactic structure, as in 1 Sam 25:25, where it clearly reflects malicious intent. In Job 1:8, the presence of the preposition עַל, combined with the accusatory tone of the passage and the surrounding vocabulary of opposition (e.g., לְהִתְצַב עַל-יְהוָה; שָׂטָן), suggests that the Satan’s attention toward Job is not benign, but adversarial and premeditated.

Since the immediate context presents a conflicting scenario—the Satan’s presence in the heavenly council (1:6) and his confrontational role in the subsequent dialogue (1:9–11)—the interpretation of עַל in a hostile sense appears more coherent. Moreover, since לֵב שִׁים + לֵב is used elsewhere to denote negative intent or the planning of evil (cf. 1 Sam 25:25; 2 Sam 19:20), the nuance of intentional scheming or hostile plotting seems possible in this context. Satan’s attitude toward Job, expressed through his language and actions, aligns with this reading and confirms that his involvement is not one of neutral inquiry, but of opposition and accusation. While “... have you fixed your mind against my servant Job” is not a literal translation, it reflects the cumulative interpretive weight of the syntax, context, and surrounding tone, which suggest deliberate and hostile preoccupation with Job, rather than neutral consideration.

Since the Satan has traversed the earth, it is reasonable to assume that he knew of Job. Thus, when God asks, he reveals and anticipates the true reason for the Satan’s presence—to bring accusations concerning Job and his household. Indeed, the Satan’s response is carefully calculated: 1:9) יִרָא אִיּוֹב אֱלֹהִים; “Does Job fear God for nothing?”. The

85. The other versions do not help to resolve the issue because in T (עַל) and S (لِ) ambiguity is preserved and V (*numquid considerasti*) interprets the entire sentence. The editors of the Complutensian Polyglot Bible preserved this meaning in their interlinear Latin translation of G when reading *contra servum meum Iob* (“against my servant Job”). José Francisco García Juan, *La traducción latina interlineal de los LXX en la Biblia Políglota Complutense: Libro de Job* (Madrid: CSIC, 2020), 96–98.

adverb חנם conveys the meaning of “freely,” “gratuitously,” or “without payment” in commercial contexts, and “in vain,” “without cause,” or “without justification” in legal settings.⁸⁶ Regarding the *qatal* verb ירא, although some have proposed translating it as a perfect (“has feared”),⁸⁷ its stative nature suggests a present sense⁸⁸—hence most versions render it “does fear” or an equivalent.⁸⁹

The Satan replies to God with two further questions and a proposal. In his first question, he does not deny Job’s piety but casts doubt on its motivation. He implies that Job’s integrity may mask self-interest. Thus, the divine-human relationship is recast as transactional⁹⁰—Job loves the gifts, not the Giver—a fact that will be proven if the blessings are withdrawn.⁹¹ In doing so, the Satan also usurps a divine prerogative—the ability to discern the intentions of the heart (cf. 1 Sam 16:7; Ps 139). The Satan continues his argument with two reproaches in an accusatory tone: הלא־את שכת בעדו ובעד־ביתו ובעד כל־אשר־לו מסביב מעשה ידי (1:10) “Have You (Himself) not fenced him, his house and all that he has, on all sides, blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land?”. The presence of the pronoun אַתָּה suggests an emphatic tone⁹² of accusation directed toward God.

The Satan’s first reproach begins with the verb שכת, likely from the root שוּך (“to hedge, to cover”), used only here and in Hos 2:8. Though rare, the meaning is clear from context.⁹³ The Satan accuses God of

86. Alonso, *Diccionario bíblico hebreo-español*, “חנם”. Likewise, G reads μὴ δωρεάν (“no cost”, “no cause”); V *frustra* (“in vain”, “without cause”); T מִגֵּן (“in vain”, “free”) and S בְּעִנְיָם (“for nothing”). For their part, Tod Linafelt and Andrew R. Davis appeal to the sense of “without effect” or “without benefit” (“Translating חנם in Job 1:9 and 2:3: On the Relationship between Job’s Piety and His Interiority,” *VT* 63 [2013]: 627-639).

87. So Gordis, *The Book of Job*, 15; Clines, *Job 1-21*, 25; Seow, *Job 1-21*, 275.

88. Paul Joüon, Takamitsu Muraoka and Miguel Pérez Fernández, *Gramática del hebreo bíblico* (IEB 18; Estella, Navarra: Verbo Divino, 2007), 374 (§ 112 a); Wilson, *Job*, 33.

89. So, G (σέβεται) and V (*timet*) who used the present indicative.

90. Newsom, *The Book of Job*, 56.

91. Ball, *The Book of Job*, 105.

92. Dillmann, *Hioh*, 10; Habel, *The Book of Job*, 90; Gray, *The Book of Job*, 127. Regarding the defective form of the personal pronoun, the *Masorah Parva* indicates that it should be read אַתָּה (and not אַתָּה), which explains the vocalization אַתָּה offered in the Leningrad B19a and Aleppo codices. The defective spelling of this pronoun is also known from other early and late texts, cf. 1 Sam 24:19; Ps 6:4; Eccl 7:22 and Nh 9:6.

93. This is certainly an agricultural metaphor. In Hos 2:8 it refers to a hedge of

having “hedged in” Job, extending this protection to his household (בית) and all his possessions (repeating בעד three times),⁹⁴ surrounding them completely (מסביב). The image may evoke a vinedresser fencing his vineyard to keep others from taking its fruit (cf. Job 19:8; Lam 3:7, 9; Hos 2:8). The Satan laments his inability to penetrate Job’s life; had there been a breach, he would have exploited it. Elsewhere in the OT, divine protection is often mediated by angels.⁹⁵

The second reproach employs the verb ברכת (“you have blessed”), clearly positive here. God has blessed “the work of his hands” (מעשה ידי), referring broadly to all human endeavors.⁹⁶ As a result, Job’s possessions have increased abundantly (פרץ),⁹⁷ implying excess. Job enjoys the very blessings promised in Deuteronomy to those who fear God and keep his covenant.⁹⁸ In such a context, divine protection and prosperity are expected (cf. Ps 33:18; 34:7–9; 115:13; Prov 22:4; 14:26–27; Eccl 7:18). Yet in this second accusation, the Satan subtly challenges God’s justice. If divine favor obscures a person’s true motives, how can integrity be discerned? His critique implicitly questions the covenant itself and the moral structure it upholds. Having made its proposal, it proposes a course of action: 1:11) וגע בכל־אשר־לו “However, throw now your hand and hit all that it possesses”). Dhorme notes that the formula וואולם is frequent in Job as a means of introducing

thorns (בסירים) and is used in parallel with the root גדר (“to raise, to build a wall”). The root שוך is associated with the nouns משוכה (“hedge, fence, enclosure”) which only occurs in Is 5:5, and שוכה (“branch”) which is only used in Judges 9:48 and 49. It would seem to refer to a fence made from thorny bushes or trees. Cf. Ibn Ezra, *El comentario de Abraham Ibn Ezra al libro de Job*, 14; Tur-Sinai, *The Book of Job*, 12. The ancient versions translate this verb from Job 1:10 as follows: G περιέφραξας (“you have put up a fence”); V vallasti (“you surrounded”); T expand טללתא אמטולתיה (“with your word you surrounded/protected him”); and S לא רגע סבבט בלמי, (“Have you not surrounded/protected him?”).

94. Similar constructions with this preposition can be seen in: בעדו ובעד ביתו (“for you, and for your house, and for all the congregation of Israel”; Lv 16:17); ובעד כל־יהודה (“for me, and for the people, and for all Judah”; 2 Kgs 22:13).

95. Cf. Gen 19:15; 48:16; Exo 14:19; 23:20; Num 20:16; 2 Kgs 6:17; Ps 34:7; 91:11; Dan 6:22. There is continuity with this teaching in the NT: Matt 4:6; Luke 4:10; Heb 1:14.

96. Dillmann, *Hiob*, 10.

97. For Dhorme the verb פרץ marks the superlative degree of רבה (*A Commentary on the Book of Job*, 7).

98. The expression יד מעשה + ברך is key in the book. Cf. Deut 2:7; 14:29; 15:10; 16:15; 24:19; 28:12.

an idea contrary to what precedes (11:5; 12:7; 13:4; 14:18; 33:1).⁹⁹ The expression $\text{יד} + \text{שלח}$ implies “to extend, throw, or release the hand” to strike a blow,¹⁰⁰ i.e., it alludes to the aggressor’s gesture. Thus, the verb נגע (from the root נגע), which can mean either “to touch” without violence or “to touch” harmfully (that is “to strike/hurt”),¹⁰¹ must be understood with the latter nuance.¹⁰² For Andersen the language of the Satan here is abrupt.¹⁰³ It continues with conviction: 1:11 $\text{אם-לֹא עַל-פְּנֵיךָ יִבְרַכְךָ}$; “[you will check] whether he does not curse you to your own face”). Whereas the conditional אם is emphatic,¹⁰⁴ the formula אם-לֹא is a mode of absolute assertion.¹⁰⁵ The Satan is shown to be completely confident of his hypothesis. עַל-פְּנֵיךָ is “in/on your face,”¹⁰⁶ more emphatic might be “in your own face,” i.e., openly (not just inwardly) and defiantly.¹⁰⁷ The verb בֵּרַךְ is again used here with the opposite sense of “curse.” The Satan is supremely confident that by stripping Job of all his possessions he will become blatantly ungodly and immediately commit the most grievous sin. Clines rightly observes that the proposition is cruel and unnatural, and the prediction is malicious speculation.¹⁰⁸ Moreover, in predicting that Job will be able to curse God, the Satan shifts the center of gravity from deeds to words.

The concern of cursing God reemerges now within the heavenly council. Just as Job feared that, amid his children’s festive gatherings, a hidden thought might arise in one of their hearts that would offend God, the divine court is confronted with a similar dilemma: could Job’s seemingly upright behavior conceal improper motives? If Job acted as

99. Dhorme, *A Commentary on the Book of Job*, 8.

100. This is a common expression in the Old Testament. Cf. for example Gen 22:10, 12; 37:22; Exod 3:20; 9:15; Deut 25:11; Jdg 3:21; 15:15; Ps 55:21; among others.

101. Alonso, *Diccionario bíblico hebreo-español*, s.v. “נגע”.

102. So de León, *Exposición del libro de Job*, 29; Dillmann, *Hiob*, 10; Duhm, *Das Buch Hiob*, 8; Seow, *Job 1-21*, 276.

103. Francis I. Andersen, *Job: An Introduction and Commentary* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 1977), 85; too Clines, *Job 1-20*, 26 (who adds peremptory).

104. Gordis, *The Book of Job*, 15.

105. Dhorme, *A Commentary on the Book of Job*, 8. This formula adds a nuance of certainty or security to an affirmation. Cf. Job 9:24; 17:2; 22:20; 30:25; 31:20, 31, 36. Hence it is often used as an introduction to the oath formula. Cf. Ball, *The Book of Job*, 106; Duhm, *Das Buch Hiob*, 8.

106. Tur-Sinai points out that in the poetic section of the book the expression occurs interchangeably with 13:15 אל (21:31 ;6:28) על or 16:8) ב without any discernible change in meaning (*The Book of Job*, 13).

107. T translates עַל-פְּנֵיךָ as $\text{בְּאִפְנֵי מִימְרְךָ}$ (“before your word”).

108. Clines, *Job 1-20*, 27.

though his children had indeed sinned, should not heaven likewise respond to the possibility of concealed transgression? After receiving divine permission, the text states, “And the Satan departed from the presence of YHWH.” His immediate departure not only signal his confidence that Job will fail but also his eagerness to bring about his downfall.¹⁰⁹

The Satan in the second celestial council meeting (Job 2:1-7a)

The second meeting of the council is presented in the same terms as the first (cf. 2:1-3 with 1:6-8).¹¹⁰ It should not be forgotten that parallelism, a fundamental stylistic feature of Semitic literature, serves here to clarify ideas and highlight their conceptual richness. The heavenly setting, the characters (God, the sons of God and the Satan), the basic structure of the dialogue (God asks, the Satan answers, God introduces Job, the Satan questions, the trial is given place) and the theme (the trial) are repeated. As new elements, new words are added to God’s presentation of Job’s case and of course the Satan adds new arguments. Only some of these new details will be commented below, supposing that it was the author’s intention that these should be noticed by the reader.

The first of these details is the sentence: **וַיָּבֹאוּ גַם־הַשָּׁטָן בְּתוֹכָם** 2:1) **לְהִתְיַצֵּב עַל־יְהוָה**; “...and Satan also came among them to oppose YHWH”). The phrase **לְהִתְיַצֵּב עַל־יְהוָה** is repeated twice in this verse, the second occurrence being applied specifically to the Satan. Since G omits the second occurrence, several scholars also propose to eliminate it as it could be a case of dittography.¹¹¹ However, all other versions support the MT.¹¹² Since the textual evidence favors considering it as original reading, an intentionality on the part of the narrator must be assumed. It has been argued previously in connection with the

109. Duhm, *Das Buch Hiob*, 9.

110. The variations are minor, for example: the second repetition of **לְהִתְיַצֵּב עַל־יְהוָה** in 2:1; 2:2) **אִי מוֹזֵה** instead 2:2) **מִשָּׁטָן** (1:7); **מֵאִין** (1:7) in defective writing instead of 2:3) **אֶל־עַבְדֵי** (1:7); **מִשּׁוֹט** (1:8) instead 1:8) **עַל־עַבְדֵי**.

111. So Duhm, *Das Buch Hiob*, 13; Ball, *The Book of Job*, 111; Gustav Hölscher, *Das Buch Hiob* (Handbuch zum Alten Testament 17, ed. by Otto Eissfeldt; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1952), 14; Samuel R. Driver and George B. Gray, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Job* (ICC 14; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986), 13 (Part II Philological Notes); Georg Fohrer, *Das Buch Hiob* (KAT; Stuttgart: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1963), 95; Tur-Sinai, *The Book of Job*, 21.

112. Versions: V (*et stare in conspectu eius*); T (לְמִקּוֹם בְּדִינָא קְדָם יי); S (לְמִקּוֹם אֱלֹהִים); Aquila and Theodotion (παρὰστυγαὶ ἐναντίον τοῦ κυρίου).

oppositional nuance of יָצַב (see concerning 1:6). The repetition of this phrase marks an emphasis by pointing out that the conflict between God and his creatures has reached a new level of intensity and that the main opponent is in fact the Satan. On the other hand, Gordis suggests that the phrase connotes Satan's insolence and rebellion against his Master.¹¹³

The second detail is found in God's assessment of Job: וְעַדְנוּ מַחְזִיק 2:3) בְּתַמְתּוֹ וְתַסִּיתֵנִי בּוֹ לְבַלְעוּ חַנּוּם; "...and yet he holds fast to his integrity, though you incited me against him to ruin him without cause"). The verb מחזיק (*hifil* participle of חָזַק "to be, to become strong") is often used to express the idea of "taking," "grasping," or "laying hold" of something, primarily someone's hand.¹¹⁴ When the object is a mental attitude, a rule of life or a moral trait (as here) the most appropriate sense may be that of "clinging," "holding fast" or "persisting" (Job 27:6; cf. Prov 4:13; Isa 56:4,6; Jer 8:5). When used as the predicate of the sentence and being part of a direct discourse it implies a present action with durative value, something that is happening at the moment of speech.¹¹⁵ The adverb עוֹד together with the predicative participle emphasizes the continuation of a process.¹¹⁶ The resulting translation of the phrase וְעַדְנוּ מַחְזִיק בְּתַמְתּוֹ to express this nuance could be, "...still he holds fast to his integrity" or "...still he perseveres in his integrity." The noun תַּמָּה ("integrity") is almost unique to Job and belongs to the same lexical family as תָּם and תָּמָם.

The verb ותסיתי is a *wayyiqtol hifil* from סוֹת meaning "to instigate," "to induce," "to incite,"¹¹⁷ almost always possessing a negative nuance. Insofar as it is not preceded by a *qatal*, its concessive nuance is apparent,¹¹⁸ being able to be translated as "... and although you incited me." It is striking that in 1 Chr 21:1 this root is also used to describe an action of Satan.¹¹⁹ In these words God not only portrays Job, but also the Satan, whom he describes as an inciter. Ravasi observes that the use of this

113. Gordis, *The Book of Job*, 19.

114. Alonso, *Diccionario bíblico hebreo-español*, "חָזַק"; Holladay, *CHALOT*, "חָזַק".

115. Joüon, Muraoka, and Pérez, *Gramática del hebreo bíblico*, 429-430 (§ 121 *cd*); Joosten, *The Verbal System of Biblical Hebrew*, 19-20.

116. Joosten, *The Verbal System of Biblical Hebrew*, 114-115.

117. Alonso, *Diccionario bíblico hebreo-español*, "סוֹת".

118. This is suggested by Morla (*Libro de Job*, 110) citing as support the reading of G (סֹט *ṣəṯ*) and V (*tu autem*).

119. The text: וַיַּעֲמַד שָׁטָן עַל-יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיְסִיתֵהוּ אֶת-דָּוִד לְמִנּוֹת אֶת-יִשְׂרָאֵל ("And Satan rose up against Israel, and incited David to number Israel.")

verb clearly conveys hostility.¹²⁰

As for the construction לַבִּלְעוּ + infinitive piel + pronominal suffix), the root בלע possesses the basic sense of “swallow” or “devour,” but in piel its semantic range includes the meaning of “destroy,” as is the case in Job 2:3.¹²¹ The suffix points as a direct object to Job.¹²² The resulting translation would be: “to engulf/destroy”.

Finally, the contrast in the use of the term חנם is striking. Initially, the Satan argued before the heavenly court that Job did not serve God “for nothing” or “without cause” (1:9). Later, God declares that it was the Satan who incited Him to ruin Job “without cause” (חנם).¹²³ This does not imply that the test lacked divine purpose, but rather that rather that Satan’s accusations were shown to be groundless.¹²⁴ As Ash observes, the verse reflects Satan’s intentions—not any admission of fault on God’s part.¹²⁵ The Satan was not truly interested in testing the sincerity of Job’s piety, but sought instead to manipulate God into inflicting enough suffering to break him. In this passage, God not only acknowledges Job’s holiness, but also the injustice committed against him, just to demonstrate the sincerity of his goodness.¹²⁶ Another issue that can be inferred from the use of this word is that evil and suffering entail ontologically no purpose or meaning, no benefit, an

120. Ravasi, *Giobbe*, 308-309.

121. Other examples where it is used in this sense are: 2 Sam 20:20; Isa 19:3; 25:7,8; Ps 21:10; Job 8:18; 10:8; Lam 2:2, 5, 8, 16; Hab 1:13. In any case, in these and other cases, it is not easy to distinguish between “devour” and “destroy” because both fit well with the meaning of some of the texts. Cf. Alonso, *Diccionario bíblico hebreo-español*, “בלע”.

122. G changes the direct object and reads δὲ εἶπας τὰ ὑπάρχοντα αὐτοῦ διὰ κενῆς ἀπολέσαι (“even though you told me to destroy his possessions without reason”).

123. Clines (*Job 1–20*, 27) interprets Job’s suffering as having been “gratuitous”. Ravasi (*Giobbe*, 308) suggests reading rather “without results,” which is also a possible translation. As support he cites the meaning of חנם (in Ezek 6:10; 14:23; Mal 1:10; Ps 109:3; 119:161; Prov 1:17), however, “in vain” or “without reason” also fit well in all these passages.

124. Eric Ortlund comments: “God is defending Job as totally unworthy of Satan’s accusation that Job does not really love God and is lying in order to enjoy a blessed life... With this in mind, we can see that God has his own reasons for allowing the ordeal to proceed, and speaks here to defend his servant as innocent of all charges in the midst of it” (“God’s Joy in Creation in the Book of Job”, *Presbyterion* 47 [2021]: 10).

125. Christopher Ash, *Job: The Wisdom of the Cross* (Preaching the Word; Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 50-51.

126. Giménez, “La persecución de Satán a Job (Job 1-2),” 365.

entirely ‘fruitless’ action.¹²⁷ By this point in the narrative, the level of conflict is clear: it is not merely a wager, but a cosmic confrontation. The Satan challenges God’s righteousness in His relationship with His creatures—beginning with Job and his family—while God aims to unveil the true character of the Adversary and expose the emptiness of his accusations before the heavenly assembly. The third detail that differs from the first meeting of the heavenly council is the argumentation of the Satan. Here he declares: עור בעד-עור וכל אשר לאיש יתן בעד נפשו (2:4); “skin for skin and all that a man¹²⁸ possesses he will give for his life”). Although the exact meaning of the saying “skin for skin” remains somewhat obscure¹²⁹ its relevance becomes clearer through the parallel phrase “all that man possesses he will give for his life” (see Table 1):

Table 1: Parallelism between proverb and explanation in Job 2:4

עור	“Skin	וכל אשר לאיש	“and all that a man possesses
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127. Bornapé, “Solo soy polvo y cenizas”, 13.

128. While the MT reads לאיש, some older versions read it indefinitely presupposing לאיש: G (ἀνθρώπων), T (בר-ינש) and S (ל-בשר). Support this reading, Gray, *The Book of Job*, 132. This would suggest a more general observation about the human being, while the MT specifies more about Job. Ball, *The Book of Job*, 113 (“... meaning not any man in general, but Eyob in particular”). The context seems to support the TM. On this see Seow, *Job 1-21*, 302.

129. Basically, the image underlying the popular saying has been discussed, whether it derives from agricultural or pastoral life, or from a legal-commercial practice or if another practice of daily life is implied. Some allude to an exchange or barter of animal skins. Duhm, *Das Buch Hiob*, 13; Luis Brates, “Job,” in *La Sagrada Escritura: texto y comentario* (Antiguo Testamento III; Madrid: BAC, 1969), 468. For his part, T translates איברא מטול איברא (“limb for limb”), understanding “skin” as a case of metonymy to speak of a part of the body that is used to cover or protect another that is considered more valuable. This same explanation can be seen in Julian of Eclana’s *Explanations of the Book of Job* (see Manlio Simonetti and Marco Conti, *La Biblia comentada por los padres de la iglesia y otros autores de la época patristica. Antiguo Testamento 7: Job* [ed. by Thomas C. Oden, ed. in spanish dir. by Marcelo Merino Rodríguez (Madrid: Ciudad Nueva, 2010), 47]; Raši, “Rashi on Job 2:4”, *Sefaria*; Ibn Ezra, *El comentario de Abraham Ibn Ezra al libro de Job*, 19. For more details on the discussions on this subject see: Duhm, *Das Buch Hiob*, 13; Tur-Sinai, *The Book of Job*, 23-25; Dhorme, *A Commentary on the Book of Job*, 16-17; Gordis, *The Book of Job*, 20; Gray, *The Book of Job*, 133-134; Seow, *Job 1-21*, 301-302; Vicchio, *The Book of Job*, 54-56. Regarding this diversity of interpretations, Ravasi opportunely states: “Le interpretazioni del proverbio si contano a decine e spesso rientrano più nella categoria delle curiosità che in quella della esegesi” (*Giobbe*, 310).

בעד־	for	יתן בעד	he will give for
עור	skin”	נפשו	his life”

In other words, human selfishness is capable of giving up anything in exchange for saving one’s own skin.¹³⁰ As Morla rightly points out, “The human being may have many things, but above all, and ultimately, he has himself”.¹³¹ Dhorme also suggests that the Satan in speaking of the skin is pointing out that the first test was only external and superficial, which is why he later asks to afflict Job in “his bone and his flesh” (2:5).¹³² The previous test did not bring Job down, but neither was it thorough enough. The restriction imposed by God not to touch Job, argues the Satan, prevents one from seeing the true nature of his obedience. Job lost everything he had at a stroke, but he remained safe and unharmed, those were things external to him and he did not yet experience the pain in the flesh. If, as with other cases, it is the narrator’s intention to build his story on the background of Genesis, עור could evoke Gen3:21.¹³³ There the life of the first human couple was prolonged to him in exchange for the death of an animal from whose skin God prepared the robes with which he covered their nakedness. The Satan then proceeds with his proposed action: **אולם שלח־נא ידך וגע אל־עצמו**: **ואל־בשרו אם־לא אל־פניך יברכך** (2:5) “...however, stretch out your hand now and strike his bone and his flesh and see if he does not curse you to your own face”). The conjunctive adverb **אולם** strongly contravenes the previous statement and highlights the one that follows.¹³⁴ “Bone” (**עצם**) and “flesh” (**בשר**) is an example of hendiadys to speak of the human body, but also of the whole being in its most intimate and vital dimension (cf. Gen 2:23). The Satan suggests with emphasis that it

130. Rosenmüller (*Scholia in Vetus Testamentum*, 33) would say: “alienum corpus pro proprio” (“the other’s body for one’s own”), with a meaning similar to that **נפש נפש תחת נפש** (“life for life”) of Exod 21:23. If one were to look for an equivalent translation that preserves the proverbial style, one could say: “taking someone else’s skin to save one’s own skin.”

131. Morla, *Libro de Job*, 112 (the translation is his own).

132. Dhorme, *A Commentary on the Book of Job*, 16-17.

133. Connection that is also noted in Robert W. E. Forrest, “The Two Faces of Job: Imagery and Integrity in the Prologue,” in *Ascribe to the Lord. Biblical & other studies in memory of Peter C. Craigie* (ed. por Lyle Eslinger y Glen Taylor, JSOTSS 67; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1988), 392.

134. Christo H. J. van der Merwe, Jacobus A. Naudé and Jan H. Kroeze, *A Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar*, 2nd ed. (London – New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), 385 (§ 40.5).

is necessary to inquire at a deeper level, and that to prove his thesis it is necessary to bring Job as close to death as possible. At the same time the expressions “his bone” and “his flesh” may subtly evoke the figure of the wife as an echo of Gen 2:23.¹³⁵ Indeed, it is as part of this second test that Job’s wife makes an appearance for the first and only time in the whole book (Job 2:9). Considering this possibility, perhaps the Satan employs the phrase “strikes his bone and his flesh” with the double meaning of alluding to both Job’s health and his wife.

The profile of the Satan from a narrative perspective

The Satan is the second-round character in the narrative besides Job. Few would doubt that his role in the narrative is of paramount importance.¹³⁶ But unlike Job he is not described by the narrator’s voice, except by his nickname or designation, “the It may be striking that in addressing God he does not use the formal language associated with court etiquette: he does not address God as “my Lord” but always with a “you” (in 1:10 adversary”), but only by his own words and actions. As for his words, he is shown with the imposture of a wise, measured, precise and calculating man with a tone of reproach, he does not speak of himself as “your servant”, he only uses the first person.¹³⁷ Right from the start, the Satan is portrayed as the antagonist, a rival of humanity who seeks to prove that humans are not truly good and deserve no divine praise.¹³⁸ Beyond being the adversary in the narrative, his character is consistently presented as malicious and misanthropic.¹³⁹

The first traits of his true nature emerge in his dialogue with God: his distorted judgment of Job’s motives reveals his opposition to divine evaluation and his disbelief in genuine righteousness. His more sinister side becomes fully evident in the sequence of lethal catastrophes he

135. Cf. Wilson, *Job*, 38.

136. Dhorme, *A Commentary on the Book of Job*, lxxviii states: “The role of Satan in the Prologue is of capital importance. To eliminate it is to mutilate most lamentably a narrative of which the graduated effects produce an admirable climax”.

137. Wilson, *Job*, 33. With lucidity he notes: “The careful selection and use of words in the prologue suggest that the accuser’s tone is a significant detail”. For Clines (*Job 1-20*, 26) his language is abrupt, peremptory.

138. Giménez, “La persecución de Satán a Job (Job 1-2)”, 364. In Peckham’s words, “The *satan*, not God, is the antagonist who instigates and wreaks havoc on Job (e.g., Job 1:12; 2:7)” (*Theodicy of Love*, 94).

139. Ball, *The Book of Job*, 103-104; Duhm, *Das Buch Hiob*, 7; Caesar, “Character in Job”, 84-103; Boyd, *God at War*, 147.

orchestrates immediately after each divine permission.¹⁴⁰ The first attack is not random—it takes place during a feast held in the house of the firstborn son, a detail emphasized twice (vv. 13 and 18). The Satan knew these celebrations stirred Job’s sensitivity and spiritual concern. The most devastating blow, undoubtedly, is the death of his children, intensified by Job’s inability to intercede for them through the usual sacrifices and purification rites. From that moment, Job’s entire life collapses.¹⁴¹ Yet the Satan is allowed to go further, afflicting Job with a rare and debilitating disease, seemingly tailored to break his spirit and isolate him from his loved ones. At this point, the Satan no longer resembles a neutral prosecutor seeking truth, but a malevolent figure who incites his victim to sin in order to create the grounds for punishment¹⁴²—a Machiavellian adversary,¹⁴³ calculated and relentless. Such an attitude cannot be in tune with the divine spirit. As Boyd rightly points out: “... it is not clear that the *Satan* in this prologue is as innocuous as the defenders of the ‘demonic-in-Yahweh’ theory suggest. There is also something sinister about the eagerness of the Satan to destroy Job”.¹⁴⁴ This development shows that, already in the book of Job, this character displays all the defining traits of the Satan found in the NT, without contradiction.¹⁴⁵ The Satan, as Brates rightly states:

He is far from being, as some would like to conclude from the text, a minister of God with an official position in the divine court: a kind of bailiff or divine prosecutor. He acts on his own impulse, driven by the desire, as the following verses show and as his name indicates, to present before God complaints and accusations against men whom he hates.¹⁴⁶

But this character is not only an adversary of men. His hostility is evident also, and mainly, towards God. At the conclusion of the two trials of the

140. De León, *Exposición del libro de Job*, 29.

141. Note the fourfold use of בַּיָּד : the Sabceans fall, the fire of God falls, the house falls, Job falls to the ground. This was already noted by Ravasi, *Giobbe*, 299; Alonso & Sicre, *Job*, 129.

142. Moses, “‘The *satan*’ in Light of the Creation Theology of Job,” 26.

143. Caesar, “A Code of Character”, 107.

144. Boyd, *God at War*, 147.

145. Cf. Lael O. Caesar, “The Issue of Suffering: Nine Christian Responses,” *JATS* 10 (1999): 81-87.

146. Brates, “Job”, 461 (my translation). He also states that here, “just as in Zechariah and 1 Kings, he has unmistakable features of the serpent of Gen 3.” This role of accuser is also assigned to him in the NT. In Rev 12:10 he is called “the accuser of our brothers” because “he accused them day and night” before God.

prologue, and the confirmation of the faithfulness of the servant Job, it becomes evident that the Satan's accusations were maliciously motivated. He raised only slanderous and infamous accusations putting the verdict before the evidence.¹⁴⁷ From all this data, the book of Job is positioned as one of the books of the Bible that most exposes the role and character of God's adversary. Caesar has noted with sufficient clarity that: "Without proper understanding of Satan's boldness and callous brilliance, great enough to challenge the Lord in His own court and viciously attack His creatures, many people have erroneously charged God with Satan's actions and developed theologies that justify their thinking".¹⁴⁸

Conclusion

The analysis of the Joban prologue yields several key conclusions essential for understanding both the narrative development and the theological implications of the text. First, the prologue presupposes a pre-existing cosmic conflict between God and his creatures, especially as embodied in the figure of the Satan, designated as השטן ("the Adversary"). This title, together with the presentation of the "sons of God" and the Satan in a posture of confrontation toward God (להתיצב 2:1; 1:6; על-יהוה) reveals a tension that frames the narrative. This cosmic conflict not only contextualizes Job's trials, but also provides a broader theological backdrop.

Second, the Satan is depicted as a celestial being whose distinctive traits are gradually revealed throughout the narrative. Though he appears among the "sons of God" (1:6; 2:1), his posture, words, and actions mark him as fundamentally adversarial to both God and humanity. While he operates within limits established by God, he is portrayed as cunning and subversive—capable of inciting God to act according to his suggestions (1:11; 2:5), manipulating divine permission for destructive purposes. His power to imitate divine actions—sending fire from heaven (1:16), raising a great wind (1:19), and striking with disease (2:7)—evokes the image of a being who counterfeits divine authority. His ability to question the motives of the righteous and propose their destruction reflects not a detached prosecutor, but a hostile and violent agent. These features, along with his apparent dominion over the earth (1:7; 2:2), align closely with later biblical portrayals of Satan as the usurper and deceiver, and underscore his ontological distinction as a

147. Moses, "The *satan*' in Light of the Creation Theology of Job," 26-27.

148. Caesar, "Job", 626.

malevolent force in the cosmic conflict.

Third, the Satan's presence in the heavenly council, introduced with the particle *וְ* ("also"; 1:6; 2:1), emphasizes his entry as anomalous. This subtle linguistic marker underscores his participation not as routine or expected, but as exceptional and disruptive—an intruder in the divine court.

Fourth, the Satan's accusations target not only human righteousness but divine justice itself. He implicitly questions the moral coherence of God's government. This accusatory role introduces a deeper theological tension, elevating the drama of Job beyond individual suffering to a cosmic interrogation of justice and divine integrity.

Finally, the heart of the prologue's conflict centers not merely on divine sovereignty, but on the nature of God's character and the authenticity of the covenantal relationship between God and humanity. The narrative invites the reader to reflect on themes of disinterested piety, divine freedom, and the endurance of faith amid affliction. Job's story thus becomes a lens through which the cosmic conflict is illuminated—not simply as a battle of power, but as a profound examination of divine justice and human integrity.

In sum, the analysis of the prologue of Job shows that a reading compatible with the traditional view—one that situates the Satan within a real theological conflict—is not only possible but textually grounded and theologically meaningful.

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