

The End



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Job 42:10–17; Gen. 4:8; Matt. 14:10; 1 Cor. 4:5; Dan. 2:44; Job 14:14, 15.*

Memory Text: “Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live’ ” (*John 11:25, NKJV*).

In writing classes, students are taught the importance of a good ending to their pieces. Particularly in fiction, where the whole thing is made up, the author needs to bring the end to a satisfactory close. But even in nonfiction, a good ending is important.

But what about reality? What about life itself, lived not in the pages of a book or in a film script but in flesh and blood? What about our own stories? What kind of endings do they have? How do they wind up? Are the loose ends tied together nicely, as in a good piece of writing?

This doesn't seem to be the case, does it? How could they end well, when our stories always end in death? In that sense, we never really have happy endings, do we, because when is death happy?

The same is true with the story of Job. Though its conclusion is often depicted as a happy ending, at least in contrast to all that Job had suffered, it's really not that happy, because this story, too, ends in death.

This week, as we begin the book of Job, we will start at its end, because it brings up questions about our ends as well, not just for now but for eternity.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 1.

Happily Ever After?

Oftentimes children's stories end with the line, "And they lived happily ever after." In some languages, it's almost a cliché. The whole idea is that whatever the drama—a kidnapped princess, a nasty wolf, an evil king—the hero and perhaps his new wife triumph in the end.

That's how the book of Job ends, at least at first glance. After all the trials and calamities that befell him, Job ends on what could be described only as a *relatively* positive note.

Read Job 42:10–17, the final texts of the entire book. What do they tell us about how Job ended his days?

No question: were you to ask someone about a book of the Bible that ended well for the main character, a book that had a "happily ever after" ending, many would name the book of Job.

After all, look at all that Job had as the story closes. Family and friends, who weren't around during the trials (with the exception of Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar, Elihu, and Job's wife), come, and they comfort him. They were generous, too, giving him money. As the story ended, Job had twice as much as he had at the beginning of the story, at least in terms of material wealth (*compare Job 42:12 with Job 1:3*). He had ten children, seven sons and three daughters, to replace the seven sons and three daughters who died (*see Job 1:2, 18, 19*), and in all the land no women were "found so fair as the daughters of Job" (*Job 42:15*), something not said about his first ones. And this man who had been so sure that death was right before him lived on another 140 years. "So Job died, being old and full of days" (*Job 42:17*). The phrase "full of days" in Hebrew (sometimes translated, interestingly enough, "full of years") is used to describe the last days of Abraham (*Gen. 25:8*), Isaac (*Gen. 35:29*), and David (*1 Chron. 29:28*). It gives the idea of someone in a relatively good and happy place at the time of a decidedly unhappy event: death.

We all like stories with happy endings, don't we? What are some stories with happy endings that you know of? What lessons can we take from them?

Unhappy Endings

The book of Job concluded with things going well for Job, who died “old and full of days.” As we all know, and know all too well, that’s not how the story ends for so many others. Even those who were faithful and honorable and virtuous didn’t always wind up in a situation such as Job’s.

How did the story end for the following Bible characters?

Abel (*Gen. 4:8*) _____

Uriah (*2 Sam. 11:17*) _____

Eli (*1 Sam. 4:18*) _____

King Josiah (*2 Chron. 35:22–24*) _____

John the Baptist (*Matt. 14:10*) _____

Stephen (*Acts 7:59, 60*) _____

As we can see, the Bible is full of stories that don’t have happy endings. And that’s because life itself is full of stories that don’t have happy endings. Whether martyred for a good cause, or dying from a horrible disease, or having a life reduced to pain and misery, many people don’t come through their trials as triumphant as Job did. In fact, to be honest, how often do things work out well, as they did for Job? And we don’t need the Bible to know this terrible fact. Who among us doesn’t know of unhappy endings?

**What are some stories with unhappy endings that you know of?
What have you learned from them?**

The (Partial) Restoration

Yes, the story of Job ended on a positive note, in contrast to the story of other Bible characters and often of other people in general. Bible scholars sometimes talk about the “restoration” of Job. And indeed, to some degree, many things were restored to him.

But if that were the complete end of the story, then, in all fairness, would the story really be complete? Certainly things got better for Job, much better, but Job still died eventually. And all his children died. And all his children’s children, and on and on, all died. And no doubt to some degree all of them faced many of the same traumas and trials of life that we all do, the traumas and trials that are simply the facts of life in a fallen world.

And, as far as we know, Job never learned of the reasons behind all the calamities that befell him. Yes, he got more children, but what about his sorrow and mourning for those whom he lost? What about the scars that, no doubt, he carried for the rest of his life? Job had a happy ending, but it’s not a completely happy ending. Too many loose ends remain, too many unanswered questions.

The Bible says that the Lord “turned the captivity of Job” (*Job 42:10*), and indeed He did, especially when compared to all that came before. But much still remained incomplete, unanswered, and unfulfilled.

This shouldn’t be surprising, should it? After all, in this world as it is now, regardless of our “end,” whether good or bad, some things remain incomplete, unanswered, and unfulfilled.

That’s why, in a sense, Job’s ending could be seen as a symbol, however faint, of the true end of all human woe and suffering. It foreshadows the ultimate hope and promise that we have, through the gospel of Jesus Christ, of a full and complete restoration in ways that will make Job’s restoration pale in comparison.

Read 1 Corinthians 4:5. What does this text tell us about how, for now, in this life, some things will still remain unanswered, unfulfilled, and incomplete? To what hope does it point us instead?

The Final Kingdom

Among other things, the Bible is a book about history. But it is not just a history book. It tells about events in the past, historical events, and uses them (among other things) to give us spiritual lessons. It uses events in the past to teach us truths about how we are to live in the here and now. (*See 1 Cor. 10:11.*)

But the Bible doesn't just talk about the past. It talks about the future as well. It tells us not just about events that have happened but about events that will happen. It points us to the future, even to the end of time. The theological term for last-day events, about end times, is "eschatology," from a Greek word that means "last." Sometimes it is used to encompass belief about death, judgment, heaven, and hell as well. It also deals with the promise of hope that we have of a new existence in a new world.

And the Bible does tell us many things about the end times. Yes, the book of Job ended with Job's death, and if this were the only book one had to read, one could believe that Job's story ended, as do all ours, with death—and that was it, period. There was nothing else to hope for, because, as far as we can tell and from all that we see, nothing comes after.

The Bible, though, teaches us something else. It teaches that at the end of time God's eternal kingdom will be established, it will exist forever, and it will be the eternal home of the redeemed. Unlike the worldly kingdoms that have come and gone, this one is everlasting.

Read Daniel 2:44, 7:18. What hope do these texts point to about the end?

"The great plan of redemption results in fully bringing back the world into God's favor. All that was lost by sin is restored. Not only man but the earth is redeemed, to be the eternal abode of the obedient. For six thousand years Satan has struggled to maintain possession of the earth. Now God's original purpose in its creation is accomplished. 'The saints of the Most High shall take the kingdom, and possess the kingdom forever, even forever and ever.' Daniel 7:18."—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 342.

Indeed, the book of Job ended with his death. The good news for us, and for Job, is that the end of the book of Job is not the end of Job's story. And our death is not the end of ours, either.

The Resurrection and the Life

Read Job 14:14, 15. What question is Job asking, and how, in his own way, does he answer it?

One of the themes in the book of Job deals with the question of death. How could it not? Any book that looks at human suffering would, of course, have to look at death, the source of so much of our suffering. Job asks if the dead will live again, and then he says that he waits for his change to come. The Hebrew word for “wait” also implies the idea of hope. It’s not just waiting for something, it is *hoping* for it.

And what he was hoping for was his “change.” This word comes from a Hebrew term that can give the idea of “renewal” or “replacement.” Often it is the changing of a garment. Though the word itself is broad, given the context—that of asking what “renewal” comes after death, a “renewal” that Job hopes for—what else could this change be but a change from death to life, the time God shall “desire the work of Your [God’s] hands” (*Job 14:15, NKJV*)?

Of course, our great hope, the great promise that death will not be the end, comes to us from the life, death, and ministry of Jesus. “The [New Testament] teaches that Christ has defeated death, mankind’s bitterest foe, and that God will raise the dead to a final judgment. But this doctrine becomes central to biblical faith . . . after the resurrection of Christ, for it gains its validation in Christ’s triumph over death.”—John E. Hartley, *The Book of Job*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament, Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), p. 237.

“Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live’ ” (*John 11:25, NKJV*). What is Jesus telling us here that gives us a hope and confidence about “the end”? That is, what do we know that Job didn’t know?

Further Thought: Despite all the horrific calamities that befell Job, not only did he stay faithful to God, but he was given back much of what he had lost. Yet even here, as with much of the book of Job, questions remain unanswered. Sure, Job is just one book of the Bible, and to build an entire theology on one book would be wrong. We have the rest of the Scriptures, which add so much more understanding regarding many of the difficult questions addressed in the book of Job. The New Testament especially brings to light so many things that couldn't have been fully understood in Old Testament times. Perhaps the greatest example of this would be the meaning of the sanctuary service. However much a faithful Israelite might have understood about the death of the animals and the entire sacrificial service, only through the revelation of Jesus and His death on the cross does the system come more fully to light. The book of Hebrews helps illuminate so much of the true meaning of the entire service. And though today we have the privilege of knowing "present truth" (2 Pet. 1:12) and certainly have been given more light on issues than Job had, we still have to learn to live with unanswered questions too. The unfolding of truth is progressive, and despite the great light we have been given now, there's still so much more to learn. In fact, we've been told that "the redeemed throng will range from world to world, and much of their time will be employed in searching out the mysteries of redemption. And throughout the whole stretch of eternity, this subject will be continually opening to their minds."—Ellen G. White, *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, March 9, 1886.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 What does the idea of progressive revelation mean? What are other examples of how the idea works? For example, one begins arithmetic by learning the numbers, how to count. We then learn how to add, subtract, multiply, and divide those numbers. We then can move on to deeper things such as algebra, geometry, and calculus, all still working with those basic numbers. How does this analogy help us understand the idea of progressive revelation in theology as well?
- 2 Read Job 42:11. Commentators through the ages have asked the question about where Job's relatives and friends were during the times of his greatest need. That is, they came *after* his fortunes had turned around and things were going better for him. What's wrong with this picture?
- 3 How many bad endings do you know of now, and what hope does the Cross give you that these bad endings do not truly end the story?

The Conversion of a Convict: Part 1

Alexandru Marin was known among law enforcement officers in much of Romania. His name and picture appeared in police stations throughout the country. He spent more than a third of his life in prison.

Alexandru didn't fit the typical image of a hardened criminal. Well-educated, multilingual, a promising artist and designer, Alexandru's future was full of promise. His older brother was a national champion athlete before he committed suicide at age 18. Marin was only 15 at the time. His grieving parents showered all their love and hopes for the future on their younger son. But he made friends with the wrong young people.

His friends delighted in breaking the law. "We knew what would happen if we were caught," he said. Eventually Alexandru was captured and imprisoned. Prison was an excellent school for crime, and as soon as Alexandru was released, he was wiser in the ways of criminals. He indulged in more illegal activities and eventually made connections with the Mafia.

Alexandru married a former schoolmate. She knew his past but hoped to reform him. But Alexandru didn't want reform. He decided to escape to Yugoslavia and later send for his wife, who was expecting their child. He made it safely across the border but had no money. "We had to steal to eat," he said. Again he was arrested and imprisoned.

The day before he was to be released, a woman who worked in the prison told him of plans to deport him to Romania. To be returned to Romania could well mean the death sentence. She gave him a metal file, and he and his cellmates began filing through the metal bars of the high security prison. They sang and made noise to conceal the sounds as they cut the steel bars on the window. The window was very small, and Alexandru had to remove his coat and shirt and put shaving cream on his body to help him slide through the tiny opening. He tells what happened next:

"Four of us tried to escape, and three made it out of the prison and into the neighboring cornfield. It was late autumn, and I had no shirt or coat. I shivered in the cold. We could hear the guards and police dogs searching for us. The dogs found my cellmate. I could tell by the cries. That's when I prayed my first prayer. 'Help me, God,' I prayed. 'If You will let me escape, I will change my life.' I meant that prayer, but after I escaped, I forgot my promise to God."

To be continued in next week's Inside Story.

The Great Controversy



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Job 1:1–5, Job 1:6–12, Zech. 3:2, Matt. 4:1, Ezek. 28:12–16, Rom. 3:26, Heb. 2:14.*

Memory Text: “And the LORD said unto Satan, The LORD rebuke thee, O Satan; even the LORD that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee: is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?” (*Zechariah 3:2*).

Scattered across the pages of both the [Old Testament] and the [New Testament] lie many references and allusions to an unrelenting war between God and Satan, between good and evil on both cosmic and personal levels. Comparing these passages, we inlay their individual insights to form a mosaic window of truth through which we can perceive the total message of Scripture with greater clarity than otherwise.”—*The Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 2000), p. 969.

The great controversy theme forms a template that can help us better understand “the total message” of the Bible, especially the plan of salvation. Though the theme is much more apparent in the New Testament, it is found in the Old Testament too. And perhaps nowhere in the Old Testament are we given a clearer glimpse of Satan and this conflict, and how they can powerfully affect life here, than in the book of Job.

This week we’ll look at the broader reality behind this immediate reality that’s the main focus of Job. And though our lives and stories are different from Job’s, we have one thing in common: like Job, we are all involved in this controversy.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 8.

A Little Heaven on Earth

The book of Job begins on a relatively positive note. From a worldly perspective at least, we see a man blessed in every way.

Read Job 1:1–4. What do the texts reveal about the kind of life that Job lived? What were the positive aspects of Job’s existence?

Job certainly seems to have it all, including a righteous character. The word translated in Job 1:1 as “blameless” (*NIV*) comes from a word that can mean “complete” or “full of integrity.” The word for “upright” means “straight,” which can give the idea of walking on a straight path. In short, the book opens with an almost Eden-like scene depicting a wealthy man of faithfulness and integrity who has it all.

Nevertheless, he has it all in a fallen world.

Read Job 1:5, 6. What do these texts reveal about the reality of the fallen world that Job inhabits?

“Amid the festivities of his sons and daughters, he trembled lest his children should displease God. As a faithful priest of the household, he offered sacrifices for them individually. He knew the offensive character of sin, and the thought that his children might forget the divine claims, led him to God as an intercessor in their behalf.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p. 1140.

Clearly Job had it good, about as good as it can get here. As Eden-like as the scene is presented—a man with a full life, big family, a great name, and many possessions—it’s still a life lived on a fallen planet steeped in sin, and so, as Job will soon see, it comes with all the dangers that existence here brings.

What are the good things in your life right now? How can you learn to be always in an attitude of thankfulness for them?

Cosmic Conflict

The book of Job begins on earth, in a place of peace and tranquility. However, by the sixth text of the first chapter, the venue changes. It instantly shifts to an entirely different aspect of reality, one that is not seen by humans unless through divine revelation. And interestingly enough, this other aspect of reality, heaven, doesn't seem to be as tranquil and peaceful as things are on earth, at least in what is first presented here.

Read Job 1:6–12. Though we will study these texts in more detail later in this quarter, what is happening here? How does it contrast to what we have just seen happening with Job on earth?

There's so much to explore in these few texts. They reveal aspects of our universe that all our space telescopes don't detect and that human science doesn't even begin to fathom. What's fascinating, though, is that they also reveal a cosmic conflict. It's not a calm, peaceful, and tranquil conversation that we access in this passage. God talks about Job with (to use a human idea) a sense of pride, like a father proud of his son. Satan, in contrast, mocks what God says about Job. "So Satan answered the LORD and said, 'Does Job fear God for nothing?' " (*Job 1:9, NKJV*). One could almost hear a sneering sarcasm, a mocking tone in what Satan says to God.

Though the text doesn't explicitly say that this confrontation was in heaven, that's surely where it was. And thus you have this created being, an angel, standing before God in heaven and challenging Him to His face, before other "sons of God." It's hard to imagine someone talking to a worldly leader like that, but here we have a being doing so to God Himself. How could this happen?

The answer is found in a theme that appears in various places and in different ways all through the Bible. It's called the great controversy, and it provides a powerful template to help us to understand not just the book of Job but the entire Bible and its explanation of the whole sad story of sin and suffering on earth. And even more important, it helps us better understand just what Jesus accomplished for us on the cross in order to solve the problem of sin and suffering on the earth.

The Conflict on Earth

The book of Job pulls back a veil and reveals a dimension of existence that our eyes and ears and worldly philosophies could never show us. (If anything, these texts should show us just how limited our eyes and ears and worldly philosophies are when it comes to understanding the big picture!) And what these few texts show, too, is a conflict between God and this other being, Satan. And though the controversy is first introduced in the book of Job as taking place in heaven, it quickly shifts to the earth. All through the Bible, we find texts that point to this ongoing conflict, one that involves us, as well.

Read the following texts. How do they reveal the reality of a conflict being fought here on earth with evil supernatural powers?

Gen. 3:1-4 _____

Zech. 3:2 _____

Matt. 4:1 _____

1 Pet. 5:8 _____

1 John 3:8 _____

Rev. 12:9 _____

These texts are just a small sampling of numerous texts that point, either explicitly or implicitly, to a literal devil, a supernatural being with malicious intentions. Though many people view the idea of Satan as a primitive myth, with such clear Bible testimony we should not fall for this deception.

What are ways that, even now, you see the reality of Satan's work in our world? What is our only protection?

Job as a Microcosm

The opening scenes of the book of Job show us a few crucial points. First, as we have stated, they reveal the reality of another dimension beyond what, of ourselves, we can now know—a heavenly dimension with heavenly beings other than God. Second, they also show just how interconnected our earthly life here is with the heavenly realm. What happens here on the earth is not disconnected from the heavenly beings in this realm. Third, they reveal a moral conflict in heaven that is indeed connected to what happens here on earth.

In short, these opening texts, and the ones that follow, are a kind of miniportrayal of the great controversy itself. The texts show one way in which the great controversy, though cosmic in scale, was manifested in the life of one man, Job. And as we will see, the issues involved encompass us all.

The book of Job shows Satan in confrontation with God. What it doesn't show is how it first started. How do the following texts help us get some understanding about the controversy? *Isa. 14:12–14, Ezek. 28:12–16, 1 Tim. 3:6.*

Ellen G. White talked about “the law of love” as the foundation of God’s government. She noted that because God does not want “forced obedience,” He therefore “grants freedom of will” to all His moral creatures. However, “there was one who perverted the freedom that God had granted to His creatures. Sin originated with him who, next to Christ, had been most honored of God and was highest in power and glory among the inhabitants of heaven.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 34, 35. She then quoted from the texts above in Isaiah and Ezekiel to describe the fall of Satan.

The crucial concept here is the “law of love” and the reality of free will. The Bible tells us that Satan became self-exalted and proud because of His own splendor and beauty. Why this happened we don’t know; it must be part of what 2 Thessalonians 2:7 calls “the mystery of lawlessness” (*NKJV*), a connection that makes perfect sense when we understand how closely tied God’s law is to the foundation of His government. The point is that by the time Satan is introduced in Job, his fall was past, and the controversy it had started was well underway.

What are some important choices that you are facing right now, and what Bible promises can you claim to ensure that you make the right ones?

Answers at the Cross

The book of Job brings up many important issues. But many of these same issues do not get answered there. We need the rest of the Bible. And even then we still “see through a glass, darkly” (*1 Cor. 13:12*).

As we saw yesterday, for example, the book of Job says nothing about how Satan’s rebellion started. Also, it says nothing about how Satan is ultimately defeated in the great controversy. In fact, despite his major role in all that follows in the book—after appearing only twice in Job (*Job 1:6–12, 2:1–7*)—Satan does not come into view again. He simply vanishes, even though the destruction that he caused remains. The rest of the book doesn’t even mention him; instead, almost all that follows in the book is about God, not Satan. And that makes sense because, in the end, the book of Job is about God and what He is really like.

Nevertheless, the Bible doesn’t leave us without answers to the question about the defeat of Satan in the great controversy. And central to that defeat is the death of Jesus on the cross.

How do the following texts help to explain what Jesus did that will lead to the end of the great controversy? *John 12:31, 32; Rev. 12:10–12; Rom. 3:26; Heb. 2:14.*

At the cross, Satan fully was exposed to the universe for what he really is, a murderer. Those who knew Jesus when He reigned in heaven must have been astonished to see Him be so degraded by Satan’s minions. That’s the “judgment” on Satan that Jesus talked about in John 12. At the cross, when the Savior died for “the sins of the whole world” (*1 John 2:2*), only then could Heaven proclaim that *salvation has now come*. Here and now the divine promise, made before the world began (*2 Tim. 1:9*), became a reality. Because of His death on our behalf, Christ could be “just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus” (*Rom. 3:26, NKJV*). That is, at the cross He refuted the devil’s charges that God could not uphold His law (be just) and still, at the same time, save those who have broken that law (the justifier). After Calvary, Satan’s doom was assured.

How can we learn to rejoice in what Christ has done for us at the cross, even amid the trials we face in the great controversy now?

Further Thought: The concept of a struggle, a controversy, between good and evil is found in many cultures. The idea has persisted throughout the millennia, often expressed through myths. Today, because of the influence of higher criticism and modernist rationalism, many Christians deny the reality of a literal devil and evil angels. These were, the argument goes, just a primitive culture's symbols for human and natural evil. From our perspective as Seventh-day Adventists, it's hard to imagine how anyone makes sense of the Bible at all without belief in the reality of the devil and his angels.

Not all Christians have fallen for the deception that denies the reality of this cosmic conflict between supernatural forces of good and evil. An evangelical scholar named Gregory Boyd, for instance, has written extensively on the reality of the age-long (but not eternal) battle between God and Satan. In the introduction to his book *God at War*, after commenting on a few passages in Daniel 10, Boyd wrote: "The Bible from beginning to end presupposes spiritual beings who exist 'between' humanity and God and whose behavior significantly affects human existence, for better or for worse. Indeed, just such a conception, I argue in this work, lies at the center of the biblical worldview." —Gregory A. Boyd, *God at War* (Downer's Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1997), p. 11. How correct he is.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 What other texts talk about Satan and other demonic powers? What is lost if these are interpreted as merely symbols for the dark side of humanity?
- 2 Niccolò Machiavelli, a Florentine writer of the sixteenth century, said that it was much better for a ruler to be feared by his subjects than to be loved by them. In contrast, Ellen G. White wrote, "Even when it was decided that he could no longer remain in heaven, Infinite Wisdom did not destroy Satan. Since the service of love can alone be acceptable to God, the allegiance of His creatures must rest upon a conviction of His justice and benevolence. The inhabitants of heaven and of other worlds, being unprepared to comprehend the nature or consequences of sin, could not then have seen the justice and mercy of God in the destruction of Satan. Had he been immediately blotted from existence, they would have served God from fear rather than from love."—*The Great Controversy*, pp. 498, 499. Why does God want us to serve Him from love and not fear?

The Conversion of a Convict: Part 2

Alexandru went to Norway, where he began drug dealing. He was nearly killed twice and thought it was Satan's power that made him invincible.

Eventually, he was arrested for drug trafficking and sent back to Romania, where he bought and sold illegal guns. His father-in-law was so angry that he called the police.

Alexandru was imprisoned for two years. Prison officials were desperate to know what to do with this man. In one final attempt to reform him, they put Alexandru in charge of the prison's social activities room. As part of his job, Alexandru had to attend all meetings.

Church services were held there, including Seventh-day Adventist meetings conducted by lay evangelists. Alexandru enjoyed confounding the speakers with difficult questions. He even read the Bible to find questions to baffle these humble men.

But fighting against religion meant he heard a lot of sermons, and asking questions meant he received a lot of answers. Gradually, Alexandru learned about God's love. During one meeting, the lay evangelist asked Alexandru to pray. His mind was in turmoil, and he found it difficult to pray.

After the meeting, the lay evangelist touched Alexandru and said, "You aren't far from the kingdom of God." Deeply moved, Alexandru began studying the Bible earnestly, looking for faith and comfort rather than for questions to confound the speaker. He realized that he now believed in God.

Prisoners and guards noticed the change in Alexandru. He started treating prisoners with kindness and the guards with respect. When his friends mentioned the change, Alexandru told them God made the difference.

Alexandru asked the lay evangelist to notify his family in Bucharest about the change in his life. His wife was astonished. She found it difficult to believe that her infamous husband could change so drastically. During the last months of his imprisonment, Alexandru became a teacher among fellow prisoners.

After Alexandru was released, he and his wife, Florentina, spent hours in serious discussion and Bible study. Step by step, he showed her the beautiful message of God's love and salvation. Little by little, she came to understand the power that had changed her husband from a hardened criminal to a gentle, kind, loving man of God.

The months following Alexandru's release from prison were difficult. His friends from the underground pressured him to re-enter the lucrative world of ill-gotten fortune. But he stood firm.

Later, Alexandru and Florentina were baptized together in the church near the prison where he was converted.

Adapted from a story written by ION BUCIUMAN, from Bucharest, Romania.

“Does Job Fear God *for* Naught?”



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: *Job 1, Job 2, 1 Cor. 4:9, Gen. 3:1–8, Phil. 4:11–13, Matt. 4:1–11, Phil. 2:5–8.*

Memory Text: “But he said to her, ‘You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?’ In all this Job did not sin with his lips” (*Job 2:10, NKJV*).

The book of Job opens up to us a whole new dimension of reality. It gives us a glimpse into the great controversy between Christ and Satan. And by doing so, it also provides us a template, a frame, an outline to help us better understand the world that we live in, a world that so often baffles, dazes, even frightens us with what it tosses our way. But the book of Job also shows that this great controversy is not merely someone else’s fight, in that we have nothing to do with it. If only that were the case; unfortunately, it’s not: “ ‘Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time’ ” (*Rev. 12:12, NKJV*). Satan has come down to the earth and to the sea, and we know for ourselves that his wrath is indeed great. Who among us, as flesh, hasn’t felt that wrath?

This week we will continue to look at the first two chapters of Job as we seek to get a greater understanding of how we fit in as the great controversy continues to rage.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 15.

God's Servant, Job

Read Job 1. Focus specifically on Satan's accusations against Job. What is Satan saying? What's implied in his attacks? Who, in the end, is Satan really attacking?

“ ‘Have You not made a hedge around him, around his household, and around all that he has on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land’ ” (*Job 1:10, NKJV*). The book of Job opens by referencing not only Job's righteousness and good character but also his material blessings and fruitful household. These were the specific things that helped make Job revered as “the greatest of all the men of the east” (*Job 1:3, NASB*). And these, too, are the specific things that Satan hurls in God's face, saying basically, “Only because You have done this for him does he serve You.”

What, then, is implied in Satan's charge that if God were to take these things away from Job, Job would “ ‘surely curse You to Your face’ ” (*Job 1:11, NKJV*)? The attack, really, is an attack against God Himself. (This is what the whole great controversy is about anyway.) If God were so wonderful, so good, then Job would obey and fear and worship Him out of love and appreciation alone. After all, who wouldn't love a God who had done so much for him? In a sense, Satan was saying that God had all but bribed Job into being faithful to Him. Thus, he claimed, Job served God not out of love for God but out of his own selfish motives.

Think about some of the most nasty and hateful political rulers who have faithful cronies loyal to the death because this ruler was good to them. If, in fact, the Lord really was the kind, loving, and caring God that He is portrayed to be, then even if Job lost all those good things, Job would still serve the Lord. By claiming, however, that Job wouldn't stay faithful, Satan insinuates that even Job doesn't fully trust Him and that Job is loyal only because of what God has given him. That is, in the end (according to Satan) Job's loyalty pretty much depends on whether it's a good business deal for him.

Why do you serve the Lord? Suppose your motives aren't perfect. If you had to wait until your motives were perfect (if they aren't), what might happen to you and your faith?

Skin for Skin: The Battle Continues

Job 2:1–3 begins almost repeating some of Job 1:6–8. The big change is the last part of Job 2:3, where the Lord Himself talks about how faithful Job remained despite the calamities that befell him. Thus, by the time we get to Job 2:3, it looks as if Satan’s accusations have been shown as false. Job stayed faithful to God and didn’t curse Him, as Satan said he would.

Read Job 2. What happens in these texts? Also, what is the significance of the fact that in both Job 1 and 2 these “sons of God” are there to witness the dialogue between God and Satan?

The phrase “skin for skin” is an idiomatic expression that has baffled commentators. The idea, though, is this: let something happen to Job’s own person, and that will cause him to show where his loyalty really is. Ruin Job’s body, his health, and see what happens.

And interestingly enough, what happens does not happen in a vacuum, either. Both instances of the controversy in heaven, as revealed here in the book of Job, take place in the context of some sort of meeting between these heavenly intelligences and God. Satan is making his accusations “publicly”; that is, he is doing it before these other beings. This idea fits in perfectly with what we know about the great controversy. It is something that is unfolding before the whole universe. (*See 1 Cor. 4:9, Dan. 7:10, Rev. 12:7–9.*)

“But the plan of redemption had a yet broader and deeper purpose than the salvation of man. It was not for this alone that Christ came to the earth; it was not merely that the inhabitants of this little world might regard the law of God as it should be regarded; but it was to vindicate the character of God before the universe. . . . The act of Christ in dying for the salvation of man would not only make heaven accessible to men, but before all the universe it would justify God and His Son in their dealing with the rebellion of Satan. It would establish the perpetuity of the law of God and would reveal the nature and the results of sin.”
—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 68, 69.

Blessed Be the Name of the Lord

After Satan’s first attack on Job, after the news came to him about all the calamities that befell him, how did Job respond? (See Job 1:20–22.) What is the significance of the fact that, even amid such tragedy, Job “sinned not, nor charged God foolishly”?

Central to God’s government, a government based on love, is freedom of choice. God wants us to serve Him because we love Him, not because we are forced to serve Him. “Satan insinuated that Job served God from selfish motives. . . . He attempted to deny that true religion springs from love and an intelligent appreciation of God’s character, that true worshipers love religion for its own sake—not for reward; that they serve God because such service is right in itself, and not merely because heaven is full of glory; and that they love God because He is worthy of their affection and confidence, and not merely because He blesses them.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p. 500.

In the book of Job, Job proved Satan’s charges wrong. However, though God knew what would happen, Job still could have acted differently. He could have sinned, he could have “charged God foolishly.” God did not force Job to act as he did. Job’s steadfast faithfulness, considering the circumstances, was an amazing testimony before men and angels.

Compare what happened in Job 1 to what happened with Adam and Eve in Genesis 3:1–8. How does the contrast make their sin appear so terrible?

Adam and Eve, sinless beings amid a true paradise, transgressed and fell into sin because of Satan’s attack; Job, amid utter pain and tragedy and ruin, stayed faithful to the Lord despite Satan’s attacks. In both cases, we have a powerful example of the great issues at stake in regard to free will.

How does Job’s reaction here show us how cheap, easy, and false our excuses for sin can often be?

Job's Wife

This is probably as good a time as any to deal with another victim in the story of Job: his wife. She appears only in Job 2:9, 10. After that, she vanishes from the story and from history. We are told nothing more about her. However, considering all that happened, who could imagine the grief that this unfortunate woman went through? Her tragedy, that of her children, and that of the other victims in chapter 1 show the universality of suffering. We are all involved in the great controversy; no one escapes.

Compare Job 2:3 to Job 2:9. What similar phrase is used both by God and Job's wife, and what is the importance of how they both use it?

It's no coincidence that the same phrase about his holding fast his "integrity" appears in both texts. The word translated "integrity" comes from the same word used in Job 1:1 and Job 1:8, often translated "blameless." The root word itself gives the idea of "completeness" and "fullness."

How unfortunate that Job's wife becomes someone who challenges Job on the very thing for which God commends him. In her grief, in her sorrow, she's pushing Job to do precisely what God says he won't do. Though we certainly can't judge her, what a lesson to us all about how careful we have to be in order not to be a stumbling block to others. (See Luke 17:2.)

Read Job 2:10. What powerful testimony does Job give here as well? See also Phil. 4:11–13.

Job reveals the genuineness of his faith. He is going to serve the Lord both in the good times and in the bad. What's fascinating, though, is that Satan now disappears from the story and doesn't appear again. And though the text doesn't mention it, we can imagine Satan's frustration and anger at Job's response. After all, look at how easily he took down Adam and Eve and so many others. The "accuser of our brethren" (*Rev. 12:10*) was going to have to find someone else other than Job to accuse.

How do we learn to be faithful to God, both in the good times and in the bad?

Obedience Unto Death

Job 1:22 reads, “In all this Job did not sin nor charge God with wrong” (*NKJV*). Job 2:10 reads, “In all this Job did not sin with his lips” (*NKJV*). In both cases, despite the attacks, Job stayed faithful to the Lord. Both texts stress the fact that Job did not sin, either with actions or with words.

Of course, the texts don’t say that Job wasn’t a sinner. They would never say that, because the Bible teaches that we are all sinners. “If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us” (*1 John 1:10, NKJV*). Being “blameless and upright,” fearing God and shunning evil (*Job 1:1, NKJV*), does not make a person sinless. Like everyone else, Job was born in sin and needed a Savior.

Nevertheless, despite all that came upon him, he remained faithful to the Lord. In this sense, in his own way Job could be seen as a kind of symbol, a faint example of Jesus (*see lesson 14*), who, amid terrible trials and temptations, didn’t give up, didn’t fall into sin, and thus refuted Satan’s charges against God. Of course, what Christ did was so much bigger, grander, and more consequential than what Job did. Nevertheless, the simple parallel remains.

Read Matthew 4:1–11. How did Job’s experience reflect what happened here?

Though in a terrible environment, His body weakened by lack of food, Jesus in His humanity, in “the likeness of sinful flesh” (*Rom. 8:3*), did not do what the devil wanted Him to do, just as Job didn’t either. And also just as Satan disappeared from the scene after Job stayed faithful, after Jesus resisted Satan’s last effort against Him, Scripture said that “the devil left Him” (*Matt. 4:11, NKJV; see also James 4:7*).

Yet, what Jesus faced in the wilderness was only the start. His real test would come at the cross, and here, too, despite everything thrown at Him (even worse than what Job faced), Jesus stayed faithful, even unto death.

Read Philippians 2:5–8. What hope does Christ’s “obedience unto death” offer us, and what does it tell us about how we should live in response to His obedience?

Further Thought: Students of the book of Job who delve into the Hebrew come across an interesting phenomenon. Job’s wife’s words to him are translated, “ ‘Curse God and die’ ” (*Job 2:9, NKJV*). Job 1:5 is translated: “ ‘It may be that my sons have sinned and *curse* God in their hearts’ ” (*NKJV*). And Job 1:11 is translated: “ ‘But now, stretch out Your hand and touch all that he has, and he will surely *curse* You to Your face!’ ” (*NKJV*). In each case, however, the word translated “curse” comes from a word that means “bless.” The word, from the root *brk*, is used all through the Bible for “bless.” It’s the same root used in Genesis 1:22, when God “blessed” the creatures He had made. The same root is used in Psalm 66:8, “Oh, bless our God, you peoples!” (*NKJV*).

Why, then, is the same verb, which means “bless,” translated as “curse” in these few texts? First of all, if the idea of “blessed” were meant in those texts in Job, the texts would be nonsensical. In Job 1:5, why would Job want to offer sacrifices to God in case his sons had “blessed” God in their hearts? The context demands a different meaning. The same with Job 1:11 and 2:5. Why would Satan think that if calamity befell Job, he would bless God? The context demands that the meaning be “curse” instead. Also, why would Job rebuke his wife for telling him to bless God (*Job 2:9, 10*)? Given the context, the text makes sense only if the idea of “curse” is meant.

Why, then, did not the author use one of the common words for “curse”? Scholars believe that it’s a euphemism, because the idea of writing down the concept of cursing God was offensive to the author’s religious sensibilities (we can see the same thing in 1 Kings 21:10, 13, where the word translated “blaspheme” is from *brk*, “bless”). So, Moses used the word “bless” instead of the actual word for “curse,” even though it’s obvious that the idea of curse was intended.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 In times of crisis, why is it so natural for people to question the reality of God or to question what God is like? Amid the harsh reality of what it means to live in a fallen world, a world in which the great controversy is real, why must we keep the reality of the Cross always before us?
- 2 Though we know the background to what was going on in the story of Job, as far as we can tell, Job didn’t know it. All he knew were the calamities that befell him. He didn’t know the bigger picture. What should this tell us about how, amid trials, we need to remember that there’s a bigger picture that we often don’t see or understand, and how can we learn to draw comfort from this realization?

Filling the Emptiness: Part 1

As the youngest child in a Romanian family and the only daughter, Elena was showered with love. Yet she felt an emptiness deep inside, but she didn't know what it was. Her friends invited her to join them at the disco, where she could fill her emptiness with music and dancing, but her parents forbade her to go.

One of Elena's friends invited her to visit the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Elena had heard that Adventists were good and honest people. But her grandmother warned her that faithful Orthodox members don't go inside of Protestant churches. So Elena didn't go.

Then someone invited Elena to attend a Week of Prayer series. *These meetings aren't regular worship services*, she reasoned, *so there can be no harm in going*. Her father gave her permission to go, so she went, partly out of curiosity about what other churches teach. She attended every meeting and learned that Jesus wants to be her personal Friend, that He loves her, died for her, and is coming again. For the first time in her life, Elena felt happiness. She wanted to hear more and decided to attend the church on Saturday.

When Elena's father realized that she wanted to attend worship services on Sabbath, he was angry. But Elena had tasted the love of Christ and knew that she must learn more. However, when she tried to leave home to go to the church, her father stopped her. "This family has only one religion," he said. "No one in this house will bring in any other religion."

But as Elena read her Bible and learned other truths she hadn't known, she decided that Saturday is God's Sabbath. She wanted to attend church, but she knew her parents wouldn't allow her to go. So she told them that she was going to visit her grandmother. On her way to church she stopped in at her grandmother's for a few minutes but then went on to church. Her grandmother knew what Elena was doing and warned her that it would bring sadness to the family.

A widow lived next door to Elena's family. She had heard of Elena's desire to attend church. She invited Elena to come to her house on Friday afternoons so she could slip off to church for the evening vespers program. Elena was careful to leave church early, so she wouldn't be seen walking with Adventists.

To be continued in next week's Inside Story.

God *and* Human Suffering



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Rom. 1:18–20; Job 12:7–10; Rev. 4:11; Col. 1:16, 17; Matt. 6:34; Job 10:8–12; Rom. 3:1–4.*

Memory Text: “Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.” (*Matthew 6:34, NKJV*).

Unlike every other book of the Bible, the book of Job is completely removed from the context of the land and people of Israel. From Genesis, with the promise to Abram that the Lord will “make of thee a great nation” (*Gen. 12:2*), to Revelation, which describes “the holy city,” Jerusalem (*Rev. 22:19*), in some way, directly or indirectly, the context of Israel and its covenant relationship with God helps shape each book.

In Job there is nothing of that, not even the seminal event in ancient Israelite history, the Exodus. The most immediate reason is that Moses wrote Job in Midian, along with Genesis (see also *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p. 1140); the Exodus had not happened yet, which explains why it's not mentioned.

But perhaps there's another even more important reason. One of the key themes of Job, human suffering, is universal. It's not limited to any one people or time. Jew or Gentile, we all know something of Job's woes, of the pain of existence in a fallen world. However unique his pain, Job represents us all in our sufferings.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 22.

God in Nature

Read Romans 1:18–20. What is Paul saying here?

What a powerful few sentences. Enough of the reality and existence of God is revealed through “what has been made” (*NASB*), that is, through the created world, that people will be “without excuse” (*NASB*) for their unbelief. Paul is saying that from the creation alone, humans can learn enough about the existence and nature of God that they can justly be condemned on the day of judgment.

No question, the natural world does reveal much to us about the existence of God. Modern science, too, has revealed to us details about the marvels of Creation that our ancestors, even just 300 years ago, much less 3,000 years ago, could not even have begun to imagine. There’s an interesting irony here, as well: the more complexity science finds in life, the less likely become the means science claims for its origin—that of accident and chance. A smartphone, for instance, which looks designed, acts designed, reveals design both inside and out, and works only through design is, of course, designed. But a human being, which looks designed, acts designed, reveals design both inside and out, and works only through design is, we are assured, a product of pure chance alone. Sadly, many people are deceived into believing such claims.

Read Job 12:7–10. How do the words here reflect the idea presented in Romans 1:18–20?

Here, too, we are told that the reality of God is seen in the created world. Though, especially in its fallen state, nature doesn’t reveal the full character of God, it certainly reveals His creative power, and aspects of His goodness, as well.

What things in nature especially talk to you about the power and goodness of God? How can you learn to draw strength and encouragement from the message it gives you?

Nothing Came From Itself

There are many good and powerful arguments in favor of God's existence. Besides the testimony of the created world, there's also what's called the cosmological argument. Basically, it's the idea that nothing came from itself and that nothing created itself. Instead, whatever was created was created by something else before it, and whatever created that had to be created by something else before it. And this goes on and on until we stop at something uncreated, something that had always existed, something that never was not in existence. And who else would that be but the God depicted in Scripture?

What do the following texts teach us about the origin of all things?

Rev. 4:11 _____

Col. 1:16, 17 _____

John 1:1–3 _____

These texts teach what is really the most logical explanation for the Creation—an eternally existing God. Some thinkers, utterly opposed to the idea of God, have come up with an alternative suggestion. Instead of an all-powerful and eternal God creating the universe, we are told that “nothing” created it. Even such a famous scientist as Stephen Hawking, who now occupies the chair that Isaac Newton once held, argues that “nothing” created the universe.

“Because there is a law like gravity the universe can and will create itself from nothing.”—Stephen Hawking and Leonard Mlodinow, *The Grand Design* (New York: Random House, 2010), p. 180.

Though Hawking surely has plenty of deep and complicated math to describe his idea, one has to wonder: here we are, a good 400 years since the beginning of the scientific revolution, and one of the world's best scientists is arguing that the universe and all that's in it came *from nothing*? Error is error, even when spoken by a great scientist.

In this context, read 1 Corinthians 3:19. Why is it always so important for Christians to keep this truth before us?

The Earliest of Books

Despite the hype of those who don't believe in God, those who believe in God have many good reasons for their belief. However, there's been one perennial problem that many have used through the ages to justify their disbelief, and that is the problem of human suffering and evil. How can God be all-good, all-loving, and all-powerful, and allow evil to exist? This has been and remains a stumbling block to many. And also, if we are honest, what believer in God, what person who has tasted and experienced the reality of God and His love, hasn't struggled at times with that question?

How interesting, then, that Ellen G. White also taught what Jewish tradition teaches: that Moses wrote Job in Midian. "The long years amid desert solitudes were not lost. Not only was Moses gaining a preparation for the great work before him, but during this time, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he wrote the book of Genesis and also the book of Job, which would be read with the deepest interest by the people of God until the close of time."—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p. 1140.

What this tells us is that of the first two books of the Bible ever penned, one of them, Job, deals with the universal issue of human pain and suffering. That is, God knew that this would be a big question for humans, and thus, right from the start, in the Word, He had Moses pen the story of Job. God let us know, early on, that we are not left alone in our pain and suffering but that He is there, He knows all about it, and we can have the hope that He will make it right in the end.

What do the following texts teach us about the reality of evil? *Matt. 6:34, John 16:33, Dan. 12:1, Matt. 24:7.*

However understandable the argument from evil against the existence of God, in light of the Scriptures it makes no sense. Though the Bible teaches the reality of an all-knowing, all-powerful, all-loving God, it also teaches the reality of evil, of human suffering and woe. Evil is not an excuse to disbelieve in God. In fact, a cursory reading of the book of Job shows that even amid his utter despondency, Job never questioned the existence of God. The question instead, and a valid one, is Why are these things happening to him?

It's only natural to have questions about the evil we see. How can we learn to trust in the goodness of God despite that evil?

The Dilemma

Read the following texts in Job. What issue is Job wrestling with? What question does he not ask? *Job 6:4–8, Job 9:1–12.*

As stated in yesterday’s study, the issue of God’s existence never came up in the book of Job. Instead, the question was, Why was Job going through these trials? And, considering all that happened to him, it certainly was a fair question, especially because he believed in God.

If, for example, someone was an atheist and trials were to come, the answer about why could be relatively simple and straightforward to him or her. We live in a meaningless and purposeless world that cares nothing about us. Thus, amid the harsh and cold and uncaring natural forces around us, we sometimes are the victims of trials that serve no purpose. How could they? If life itself serves no purpose, then the trials that accompany that life must be just as meaningless.

While many might find this answer unsatisfying and hopeless, it certainly makes sense given the premise, which is that there is no God. On the other hand, for someone like Job, the dilemma is different.

Read Job 10:8–12. How do these texts help us to understand the terrible questions that Job is wrestling with?

Yes, the question that Job is wrestling with is the same one that most believers in God have wrestled with and still do wrestle with: If God exists, and He is a good and loving God, why do humans suffer the things that they do? Why do even “good” people, such as Job, go through calamities and trials that so often seem to produce nothing of value? Again, if the universe were godless, the answer would be that this is simply what it means to live in a purely materialistic cosmos in which human beings are merely the accidental by-products of atoms and molecules.

Job knew better than that. We do, too; hence the dilemma.

Theodicy

Read Romans 3:1–4. Though the immediate context is the unfaithfulness of some of God’s covenant people, what is the bigger issue that Paul is talking about here? What is Paul saying about God?

Quoting Psalm 51:4, Paul talks about how the Lord Himself will “be justified in your words and will prevail when you are judged” (*Rom. 3:4, NET*). The idea being presented is a motif that appears in various places in the Scriptures. It’s called theodicy, and it is the question of understanding the goodness of God in the face of evil. It’s the age-old question that we have been looking at all week. In fact, the whole great controversy itself is really a theodicy. Before humans, before angels, before the whole universe, the goodness of God will be revealed despite the evil that unfolds in the world.

“Every question of truth and error in the long-standing controversy has now been made plain. The results of rebellion, the fruits of setting aside the divine statutes, have been laid open to the view of all created intelligences. The working out of Satan’s rule in contrast with the government of God has been presented to the whole universe. Satan’s own works have condemned him. God’s wisdom, His justice, and His goodness stand fully vindicated. It is seen that all His dealings in the great controversy have been conducted with respect to the eternal good of His people and the good of all the worlds that He has created.” —Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 670, 671.

However hard it might be for us now to understand, immersed as we are in a world of sin and suffering (and if it’s hard for us, imagine what Job must have thought), when it is all over we will be able to see the goodness and justice and love and fairness of God in all His dealings with humanity, with Satan, and with sin. This doesn’t mean that everything that happens in the world is good; clearly it’s not. It means only that God is dealing with it in the best way possible, and then when this terrible experience with sin is over, we will be able to shout: “ ‘Great and marvelous are Your works, Lord God Almighty! Just and true are Your ways, O King of the saints!’ ” (*Rev. 15:3, NKJV*).

Why is it so important to be praising God, even now, even amid the trials that seem so hard to bear?

Further Thought: Christian writer and apologist C. S. Lewis wrote a book talking about the death of his wife and his struggle to come to terms with that death. In it he wrote, “Not that I am (I think) in much danger of ceasing to believe in God. The real danger is of coming to believe such dreadful things about Him. The conclusion I dread is not ‘So there’s no God after all,’ but ‘So this is what God’s really like. Deceive yourself no longer.’”—*A Grief Observed* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1996), pp. 6, 7. This, too, is the question that Job himself struggled with. As we saw, he never doubted God’s existence; what he struggled with was the question of the character of God. Job had faithfully served the Lord. Job had been a “good” man. Therefore he knew that he did not deserve the things that were happening to him. Thus, he was asking the question that so many people who believe in God ask amid tragedies: *What is God really like?* And is this not what the great controversy is really about? The question is not about God’s existence but about His character. And though so much is involved in resolving the great controversy, there’s no question that the death of Jesus on the cross, where the Son of God had “given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma” (*Eph. 5:2, NKJV*), more than anything else revealed to the cosmos the true character of our Creator. The Cross shows us that God is a God in whom we can all trust.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Dwell on the question of suffering for those who don’t believe in God. As we saw, they don’t have to struggle with the same questions that believers in God do when facing tragedy. On the other hand, what hope can they have of ever getting answers, of ever finding resolution? Imagine going through all that we go through here in this world and then to believe that it all ends in the grave, with nothing beyond. No wonder so many unbelievers despair of life or of even finding any meaning to life. Secular literature is filled with their exclamations and protests about how meaningless it all is. How can we, then, even amid our sorrows here, draw hope from our faith, despite the difficult questions that remain?
- 2 Why is it so important for us, right now, to dwell on the Cross, the most powerful revelation we have of God’s love and of what God is like? When we are engulfed by sorrow, by tragedy, by inexplicable evil, what does the Cross tell us about the character of God? When we keep the reality of the Cross always before us, what hope can we draw for ourselves for the ultimate outcome of whatever we face now?

Filling the Emptiness: Part 2

After several weeks of deception, Elena realized that she was telling lies in order to worship God, and that wouldn't be acceptable to Him. She decided to be truthful and accept the consequences.

But her father already suspected what she was doing. He watched her enter the widow's house, then leave a half hour later. He went next door and asked for his daughter. The widow told him she had left, but she would return in a half hour. But that night Elena was so deeply touched as the speaker described how Jesus suffered for humanity that she couldn't tear herself away before the service ended.

On her way home she thought, *If God suffered so much for me, maybe I will have to suffer for Him, too. I will be faithful and look to Jesus for strength.* She had no idea how soon her suffering would begin.

She returned to the widow's home overjoyed by what she had heard. But the widow warned her, "Be careful; your father is angry."

She found her father waiting for her at home. He yelled at her, demanding to know where she had been.

"I've been at the church," she said. "I liked it very much."

"You won't go to that church again!" he yelled. "You will have nothing to do with Seventh-day Adventists ever again!" He went to her room and gathered all her religious books and tore them up. Then he threw them on a pile in the yard and burned them.

Her father tried every means he knew to convince Elena to stop this "nonsense." But Elena had seen God's better way and refused to disobey Him. When she told her father this, he shouted, "I would rather kill you than have a daughter who disobeys me! You are no longer my daughter!"

"OK," she said. "If you won't let me be your daughter, then I will be the daughter of God!"

One Sabbath, Elena awoke and found everyone sleeping. She decided to go to church in spite of her father's threats to beat her. As she prepared to leave the house, he saw her. "Where are you going?" he asked.

"To the Adventist church," she answered.

"OK," he said calmly. "But don't stay long."

Later, Elena's father saw her come home and asked, "Who said you could go to the church?"

"You did," Elena said.

"When?" he asked, confused.

"This morning. Don't you remember?"

The tension between Elena and her father made it difficult for her to remain in the home. But Elena had nowhere else to go.

To be continued in next week's Inside Story.

Curse *the* Day



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Job 3:1–10, John 11:11–14, Job 6:1–3, 7:1–11, James 4:14, Job 7:17–21, Ps. 8:4–6.*

Memory Text: “ ‘You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created’ ” (*Revelation 4:11, NKJV*).

As we read the story of Job, we have two distinct advantages: first, knowing how it ends, and second, knowing the background, the cosmic conflict operating behind the scenes.

Job knew none of this. All he knew was that he was going along in his life just fine when suddenly one calamity after another, one tragedy after another, swooped down upon him. And next, this man, “the greatest of all the people of the East” (*Job 1:3, NKJV*), was reduced to mourning and grieving on a pile of ashes.

As we continue to study Job, let's try to put ourselves in Job's position, for this will help us better understand the confusion, the anger, the sorrow that he was going through. And in one sense this shouldn't be very hard for us, should it? Not that we have experienced what Job did, but that who among us, born of human flesh in a fallen world, doesn't know something of the perplexity that tragedy and suffering brings, especially when we seek to serve the Lord faithfully and do what is right in His sight?

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 29.

Let the Day Perish

Imagine that you are Job. Inexplicably your life, all that you have worked for, all that you have accomplished, all that God has blessed you with, comes tumbling down. It just doesn't make sense. There doesn't seem to be any reason, good or bad, for it.

Years ago, a school bus went off the road, killing many of the children. In that context, one atheist said that this is the kind of thing you can expect in a world that has no meaning, no purpose, no direction. A tragedy like that has no meaning, because the world itself has no meaning.

As we have seen, though, this answer doesn't work for the believer in God. And for Job, a faithful follower of the Lord, this answer didn't work either. But what was the answer, what was the explanation? Job didn't have one. All he had was his extreme grief and all the questions that inevitably accompanied it.

Read Job 3:1–10. How does Job first express his grief here? In what ways might any of us relate to what he is saying?

Life, of course, is a gift from God. We exist only because God has created us (*Acts 17:28, Rev. 4:11*). Our very existence is a miracle, one that has stumped modern science. Indeed, scientists aren't even in total agreement on what the definition of "life" is, much less how it came about, or even more important, why it did.

Who, though, in moments of despair, hasn't wondered if life was worth it? We're not talking about the unfortunate cases of suicide. Rather, what about the times when, like Job, we might have wished that we hadn't been born to begin with?

An ancient Greek once said that the best thing that could happen to a person, outside of dying, is never to have been born at all. That is, life can be so miserable that we would have been better off not even existing and thus been spared the inevitable anguish that comes with human life in this fallen world.

Have you ever felt the way Job felt here, that is, wishing you had never been born? Eventually, though, what happened? Of course, you felt better. How important it is for us to remember that, even in our worst moments, we have the hope, the prospect, of things improving.

Rest in the Grave

Read Job 3:11–26. What is Job saying here? How is he continuing his lament? What does he say about death?

We can only imagine the terrible sorrow that poor Job was facing. However hard it must have been to have his possessions destroyed and his health taken away from him, Job lost all his children. All of them. It's hard enough to imagine the pain of losing one child. Job lost them all. And he had ten! No wonder he wished that he were dead. And again, Job had no idea of the background behind it all, not that it would have made him feel better had he known, would it?

Notice, though, what Job says about death. If he had died, then what? The bliss of heaven? The joy of the presence of God? Playing a harp with the angels? There is nothing of that kind of theology there. Instead, what does Job say? “‘For now I would have lain still and been quiet, I would have been asleep; then I would have been at rest’ ” (*Job 3:13, NKJV*).

Read Ecclesiastes 9:5 and John 11:11–14. How does what Job says fit in with what the Bible teaches on what happens after death?

Here, in one of the oldest books of the Bible, we have what is perhaps one of the earliest expressions of what we call the “state of the dead.” All Job wanted, at this point, was to be “at rest.” Life suddenly had become so hard, so difficult, and so painful that he longed for what he knew death was, a peaceful rest in the tomb. He was so sad, so hurt, that, forgetting all the joy he had in life before the calamities came, he wished he had died even at his birth.

As Christians, we certainly have wonderful promises for the future. At the same time, amid present sufferings, how can we learn to remember the good times we had in the past and to draw comfort and solace from them?

Other People's Pain

Job finished his first lament, as recorded in chapter 3. For the next two chapters, one of his friends, Eliphaz, gives Job a lecture (we will come back to that next week). In chapters 6 and 7, Job continues to speak about his suffering.

How is Job expressing his pain in the following text: “**Oh, that my grief were fully weighed, and my calamity laid with it on the scales! For then it would be heavier than the sand of the sea**” (*Job 6:2, 3, NKJV*).

This image gives us an idea about how Job perceived his suffering. If all the sands of the sea were on one side of the balances and his “grief” and “calamity” on the other, his sufferings would outweigh all the sand.

That’s how real Job’s pain was to him. And this was Job’s pain alone, no one else’s. Sometimes we hear the idea of the “sum total of human suffering.” And yet, this does not really express truth. We don’t suffer in groups. We don’t suffer anyone’s pain but our own. We know only our own pain, only our own suffering. Job’s pain, however great, was no greater than what any one individual could ever know. Some well-intentioned people might say to someone else, “I feel your pain.” They don’t; they can’t. All they can feel is their own pain that might come in response to someone else’s suffering. But that’s always and only what it is, their own pain, not the other person’s.

We hear about disasters, human-made or otherwise, with large death tolls. The numbers of dead or injured stun us. We can hardly imagine such massive suffering. But as with Job, as with every case of fallen humanity from Adam and Eve in Eden to the end of this world, every fallen being who has ever lived can know only his or her own pain and no more.

Of course, we never want to downplay individual suffering, and as Christians we are called to seek to help alleviate hurt when and where we can (*see James 1:27, Matt. 25:34–40*). Yet, no matter how much suffering exists in the world, how thankful we can be that not one fallen human suffers more than what one individual can. (There’s only one exception; see lesson 12.)

Dwell more on this idea that human suffering is limited only to each individual. How does this help you (if it does) to look at the troubling issue of human suffering in a somewhat different light?

The Weaver's Shuttle

Imagine the following conversation. Two people are bemoaning the fate of all humanity: death. That is, no matter how good the lives they live, no matter what they accomplish, it's going to end in the grave.

"Yeah," gripes Methuselah to a friend. "We live, what, 800, 900 years, and then we are gone. What is 800 or 900 years in contrast to eternity?" (See *Genesis 5*.)

Though it's hard for us today to imagine what it would be like to live for hundreds of years (Methuselah was 187 years old when his son Lamech was born, and Methuselah lived 782 years after that), yet even the antediluvians, facing the reality of death, must have bemoaned what could have seemed to them like the shortness of life.

Read Job 7:1–11. What is Job's complaint? See also Ps. 39:5, 11; James 4:14.

We just saw Job seeking the rest and relief that would come from death. Now he's lamenting how quickly life goes by. He is saying basically that life is hard, full of toil and pain, and then we die. Here's a conundrum we often face: we bemoan how fast and fleeting life is, even when that life can be so sad and miserable.

A Seventh-day Adventist woman wrote an article about her struggle with depression and even thoughts of suicide. And yet she wrote: "The worst part was that I was an Adventist who observed a lifestyle proven to help me live 'six years longer.'" That didn't make sense. Of course, at times of pain and suffering, so many things don't seem to make sense. Sometimes, amid our pain, reason and rationality go by the wayside, and all we know is our hurt and fear, and we see no hope. Even Job, who really knew better (*Job 19:25*), cried out in his despair and hopelessness: "Oh, remember that my life is a breath! My eye will never again see good" (*Job 7:7, NKJV*). Job, for whom the prospect of death now seemed nearer than ever, still bemoaned how short that existence was, no matter how presently miserable it was at the time.

How should your understanding of the Fall, of death, and of the promise of the resurrection help you to put into perspective the whole question of how fast life goes by?

“*Mah Enosh?*” (What Is Man?)

Again, we must put ourselves in Job’s position. *Why is God doing all this to me, or why is He allowing this to happen to me?* Job hasn’t seen the big picture. How can he? He knows only what has happened around him and to him, and he doesn’t understand any of it.

Who hasn’t been in a similar situation?

Read Job 7:17–21. What is Job expressing here? What questions is he asking? Considering his situation, why do the questions make so much sense?

Some scholars have argued that Job was mocking Psalm 8:4–6, which reads: “What is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him? For You have made him a little lower than the angels, and You have crowned him with glory and honor. You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet” (*NKJV*; see also *Ps. 144:3, 4*). The problem, though, is that Job was written long before the Psalms. In that case, then, perhaps the psalmist wrote in response to Job’s lament.

Either way, the question “*Mah enosh?*” (What is man?) is one of the most important we could ask. Who are we? Why are we here? What is the meaning and purpose of our lives? In Job’s case, because he believes that God has “targeted” him, he is wondering why God bothers with him. God is so big, His creation so vast; why should He deal with Job at all? Why does God bother with any of us at all?

Read John 3:16 and 1 John 3:1. How do these texts help us to understand why God interacts with humanity?

“As John beholds the height, the depth, and the breadth of the Father’s love toward our perishing race, he is filled with admiration and reverence. He cannot find suitable language to express this love, but he calls upon the world to behold it: ‘Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God.’ What a value this places upon man! Through transgression the sons of men became subjects of Satan. Through the infinite sacrifice of Christ, and faith in His name, the sons of Adam become the sons of God. By assuming human nature, Christ elevates humanity.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 563.

Further Thought: “In an era so unprecedentedly illuminated by science and reason, the ‘good news’ of Christianity became less and less convincing a metaphysical structure, less secure a foundation upon which to build one’s life, and less psychologically necessary. The sheer improbability of the whole nexus of events was becoming painfully obvious—that an infinite, eternal God would have suddenly become a particular human being in a specific historical time and place only to be ignominiously executed. That a single brief life taking place two millennia earlier in an obscure primitive nation, on a planet now known to be a relatively insignificant piece of matter revolving about one star among billions in an inconceivably vast and impersonal universe—that such an undistinguished event should have any overwhelming cosmic or eternal meaning could no longer be a compelling belief for reasonable men. It was starkly implausible that the universe as a whole would have any pressing interest in this minute part of its immensity—if it had any ‘interests’ at all. Under the spotlight of the modern demand for public, empirical, scientific corroboration of all statements of belief, the essence of Christianity withered.”—Richard Tarnas, *Passion of the Western Mind* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1991), p. 305. What is the problem with this thought? What is the author missing? What does this excerpt teach us about the limits of what “science and reason” can know of the reality of God and His love for us? What does this show us about the need for revealed truth, truth that human “science and reason” cannot reach in and of themselves?

Discussion Questions:

- 1 How would you, as a Christian, answer the question, “What is man?” How would your answer differ from that of people who don’t believe in the God of the Bible?
- 2 “How surely are the dead beyond death,” wrote Cormac McCarthy. “Death is what the living carry with them.” Why should our understanding of what happens after death give us comfort regarding our beloved dead? Can we not draw some consolation, or *any* at all, knowing that they are at peace, at rest, free from so many of the toils and troubles of life?
- 3 Why do you think that even in the most miserable of situations most people cling to life, regardless of how bad that life seems to be?
- 4 Discuss what the Cross teaches us about the value of humanity, about the value of even a single life.

Filling the Emptiness: Part 3

One Friday evening, Elena cried throughout the church service. The visiting minister noticed and asked the pastor about her. When he learned that she had problems with her family, he offered her a job caring for his children. Elena knew that her father would never permit her to work for a Seventh-day Adventist Church, so she told the Adventist minister that she would let him know later whether or not she could accept his kind offer.

During the following week, Elena asked her father several times for permission to work for this family, but he always refused. “Why won’t you let me work for these people?” Elena finally asked him. “You have told me to look to Adventists for my food, but you won’t let me work for Adventists.”

Finally, he gave permission for Elena to go work for the Adventist family. She was thrilled. She could live with an Adventist family, attend every worship service, enjoy family worship, and read her Bible and Adventist books without fear. She grew spiritually during the year she lived with this family. But then the pastor moved, and Elena faced returning to her father’s home.

Her brother had moved to Spain, and Elena convinced her father to allow her to join her brother there. Her father allowed her to go, sure that his son would keep her from the Adventist church. But when her brother met her at the station, he astounded her with an invitation. “This Sabbath let’s go to church.” He had begun to attend the Adventist church! The two went to church together, and in a short time Elena was baptized.

As time went on, however, and Elena still hadn’t been able to find work in Spain, she began to think about returning to Romania. But her brother challenged her. “Where is your faith? I thought you trusted God!” Elena realized that her brother was watching her and that she must be strong. They prayed that she would find work, and soon she found work with a family that gave her Sabbaths off.

Elena’s father now regrets the harsh words that he spoke to her, but he has told her that if she ever returns home, she must leave her religion behind. And that, she says, she will never do.

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The Curse Causeless?



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: *Ps. 119:65–72; Job 2:11–13; Job 4:1–21; Rom. 3:19, 20; 1 Cor. 3:19; Heb. 12:5; Matt. 7:1.*

Memory Text: ““Can a mortal be more righteous than God? Can a man be more pure than his Maker?”” (Job 4:17, NKJV).

Last week we stressed the importance of putting ourselves in the position of Job, at least to whatever degree possible. In one sense, it shouldn’t have been that hard, because we’ve all been there; that is, to some degree we’ve all found ourselves immersed in suffering that so often seems to make no sense and certainly doesn’t seem fair.

While in the rest of the lesson we should try to keep that perspective, we also need to find the perspective of the other people in the story, the men who come to mourn and grieve with Job.

And that shouldn’t be so hard either. Who among us hasn’t seen the suffering of others? Who hasn’t sought to console others in their pain and loss? Who doesn’t know what it is like to try to find the right words to speak to those whose grief cuts at our own hearts, as well?

In fact, so much of the book of Job really is taken up with the dialogue between Job and these men, as they all try to make sense of what so often seems to make no sense: the endless parade of human suffering and tragedy in a world created by a loving, powerful, and caring God.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 5.

The Big Questions

Most of the action in the book of Job takes place in the first two chapters. Here the veil between heaven and earth is lifted, and we are given a glimpse into a whole aspect of reality that otherwise would remain hidden from us. However far our telescopes can peer into the cosmos, they haven't come anywhere near revealing to us what we have been shown in this book, written thousands of years ago in a desert that is most likely located in today's Saudi Arabia. Job also shows just how closely connected the supernatural realm, the realm of God and angels, is with the natural world, the earth and those of us upon it.

After the first two chapters, much of Job consists of what is called in the TV business "talking heads"; that is, just dialogue. In this case, the talking heads are Job and the men who come to discuss the heavy issues of life: theology, pain, philosophy, faith, life, and death.

And why not, considering all that has happened to Job? It's so easy to be caught up in the mundane things of life, the business of just living day by day, and to forget what the big and important questions are. There is nothing like a calamity, either our own or that of others, to shake us out of our spiritual lethargy and get us to start asking the important questions.

Read Psalm 119:65–72. What is the psalmist saying?

The psalmist was able to see the good that arose from the trials that afflicted him. At times, trials can certainly be blessings in disguise, in that they either lead us back to the Lord or bring us to Him in the first place. Who hasn't heard stories of those whose lives came to a crisis point, and only then did the person either come back to God or surrender to Him for the first time? Sometimes trials, however horrific and tragic, can be used for a good that, over time, we can see. Other times they appear arbitrary and meaningless.

How have you been able to look back at former trials and seen the good that has come out of them? How do you deal with those trials that have brought nothing good?

When Have the Innocent Perished?

Read Job 2:11–13. What does it tell us about how Job’s friends viewed his situation?

Having heard about what happened to Job, these men made “an appointment” (*Job 2:11, NKJV*); that is, they planned to come together and see their friend. The texts convey the idea that they were stunned at what they saw, and they began the process of mourning with him.

According to the text, they sat silently, never saying a word. After all, what do you say to someone in a position such as Job’s? However, once Job first spoke, uttering his complaints, these men had plenty to say.

Read Job 4:1–11. What is the gist of Eliphaz’s words to Job?

Perhaps a good opening for a book on grief counseling could feature Eliphaz here. The opening chapter could have been titled “What Not to Say to a Grieving Soul.” Though obviously these men sympathized with Job, that sympathy went only so far. It seems that for Eliphaz, theological purity was more important than basic consolation. It’s hard to imagine someone coming up to a person going through all that Job was going through and saying, basically, *Well, you must have deserved it, because God is just, and only the wicked suffer like this.*

Even if one thought that this was the situation in Job’s case, what good did it do to say it to him? Suppose a speeding driver got into a car accident and lost his entire family. Can you imagine someone going up to him, amid his grief, and saying to him right away, *God is punishing you for your speeding*? The problem with Eliphaz’s words isn’t just the questionable theology; the bigger issue is his insensitivity to Job and all that he is going through.

Think about a time people comforted you amid loss and pain. What did they say? How did they say it? What did you learn from that experience that could help you when you are in the position of having to comfort someone else?

A Man and His Maker

Eliphaz wouldn't exactly win any awards for tact and sympathy with his opening lines. Basically he was saying that it was easy for Job to be a light and comfort to others when things were going well. But now that evil had befallen him, he was "troubled." Yet, shouldn't he be? Eliphaz said that God is just, and so the evil that comes upon us is deserved.

Read Job 4:12–21. What other argument does Eliphaz present to Job?

There are many fascinating things one could look at here, including how these men understood the nature and character of the true God, even before the rise of the nation of Israel. This whole book shows us that, indeed, others besides the patriarchs and then eventually the Israelites knew something of the Lord. Here, in fact, we see Eliphaz seeking to defend the character of God.

What Eliphaz heard in "visions of the night" was in many ways very sound theology (see *Ps. 103:14; Isa. 64:7; Rom. 3:19, 20*). We as humans are clay, we are so temporary, and we can be crushed as easily as a moth. And, of course, what man or woman can be more righteous than God?

On the other hand, his words were trite and beside the point. The issue with Job wasn't whether Job was better than God. That was not Job's complaint. He mostly talked about just how miserable he was, how much he was suffering, not that he was somehow more righteous than God.

Eliphaz, however, seems to have read all this into what Job said. After all, if God is just, and evil comes only upon evil, then Job must have done something to deserve what he was going through. Therefore Job's complaints were unfair. Eager to defend God, Eliphaz starts to lecture Job. Even more than just whatever collective wisdom he believed he had about God, Eliphaz had something else as well: a supernatural revelation of some kind to buttress his position. The only problem, however, is that the position he took misses the point.

What can we learn from this account about how, even if we are right on a position, we might not be expressing it in the most helpful and redeeming way?

The Foolish Taking Root

In chapter 5, Eliphaz continues with his argument. It's mostly the same as what he said in the previous chapter: evil happens only to evil people. Imagine how this must have felt to Job, who knew that it couldn't be right and that he didn't deserve his present situation.

However, there is a problem here: not all that Eliphaz is saying here is wrong. On the contrary, many of these same thoughts are echoed in other parts of the Bible.

How do the following texts reflect the sentiments expressed in Job 5?

Ps. 37:10 _____

Prov. 26:2 _____

Luke 1:52 _____

1 Cor. 3:19 _____

Ps. 34:6 _____

Heb. 12:5 _____

Hos. 6:1 _____

Ps. 33:19 _____

Rush to Judgment

Much of what Eliphaz said to Job was correct. That is, he made many valid points, points that we found were expressed later in the Bible. And yet, something still was terribly wrong with his response to Job. The problem wasn't so much with what he said; the problem was more the context in which he said it. What he was saying, the truths he was uttering, just didn't apply to the specific situation. (See next week's lesson.)

Our world is a complicated place. It's easy to look at a situation and then toss out a few clichés or even a few Bible texts that you think apply. Maybe they do. But often they don't. Look at this statement from Ellen G. White about how we often bring upon ourselves the things that happen to us. "No truth does the Bible more clearly teach than that what we do is the result of what we are. To a great degree the experiences of life are the fruition of our own thoughts and deeds."—*Education*, p. 146.

This is a profound and important truth. But could you imagine some well-meaning saint going up to someone in a situation like Job's and reading to that person the preceding Ellen G. White statement? (In some cases, unfortunately, we can imagine that.) How much better would it have been for the well-meaning saint to have followed this counsel instead? "Many think that they are representing the justice of God while they wholly fail of representing His tenderness and His great love. Often the ones whom they meet with sternness and severity are under the stress of temptation. Satan is wrestling with these souls, and harsh, unsympathetic words discourage them and cause them to fall a prey to the tempter's power."—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 163.

The fact is, as is so often the case, there's much more going on here than Eliphaz and all the others, including Job, knew. So, Eliphaz's rush to judgment, even with all his correct theology, was hardly the right thing to do, given the circumstances.

Why should the following texts always be in the forefront of our minds when dealing with anyone, especially those whom we believe have sinned? *Matt. 7:1, 2; Rom. 2:1–3; 1 Cor. 4:5.*

Even if Eliphaz had been right, and Job brought this suffering upon himself, his words were imprudent and ill-timed. Job stands as a symbol for all humanity, for we all have been caught up in the great controversy, and we all suffer in it. And we all, at some point, need compassion and sympathy, not sermonizing. Sure, there's a time and place for getting lectured. But when a man is sitting on a pile of ashes, his life ruined, his children dead, and his body full of sores—that is not the time.

Further Thought: As we have seen, Eliphaz was not without sympathy for Job. It's just that his sympathy took second place to what he saw as his need to defend the character of God. After all, Job was suffering terribly, and God is just; therefore, Job must have done something to deserve what happened to him. That's what God's justice is all about, Eliphaz concluded. Therefore, Job was wrong in his complaining.

Of course, God is just. But that doesn't automatically mean that we will see His justice made manifest in every situation that happens in this fallen world. The fact is, we don't. Justice and judgment will come, but not necessarily now (*Rev. 20:12*). Part of what it means to live by faith is to trust God that the justice so lacking here will one day be revealed and made manifest.

What we see with Eliphaz also appears in the attitude of some of the scribes and Pharisees toward Jesus. These men were so caught up in their desire to be "faithful" and religious that their anger at the Lord's Sabbath healings (*see Matthew 12*) trumped what should have been their happiness that the sick had been healed and had had their suffering relieved. No matter how specific Christ's words were in the following text, the principle is one that we who love God and who are jealous for Him must always remember: "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithes of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone" (*Matt. 23:23*).

Discussion Questions:

- 1 How can we know the difference between the time someone needs compassion and sympathy and when a person needs lecturing and maybe even rebuke? Why would it generally be better to err on the side of compassion and sympathy when dealing with those who are suffering, even through their own sins and misdeeds?
- 2 Read again Eliphaz's words to Job in chapters 4 and 5. In what situation might those words have been more appropriate than they were here?
- 3 Suppose you had been a friend of Job's and had gone to see him as he sat on the pile of ashes. What would you have said to him, and why? If that had been you in his place, what would you want people to say to you?

Beautiful in God's Time: Part 1

Mihaela was the only child in her close-knit Romanian family. Her parents were teachers, and the family enjoyed spending time together.

When Mihaela's mother began attending the Seventh-day Adventist Church, her father didn't object, but Mihaela did. She was 18 at the time and challenged her mother's new ideas. When her mother took off her jewelry, Mihaela told her that she looked naked. Nevertheless, Mihaela still loved her mother and wanted to please her.

When Mihaela entered the university, she often found her thoughts drifting toward God and religion. She thought about what her mother had told her about Adventist beliefs and even defended those beliefs in debates with other students. But she resisted a deeper interest in religion. She reasoned that she was young and had a lifetime to think about God and religion.

While studying at the university, Mihaela met a popular young man. It seemed that every girl on campus wanted to date him. He was handsome and charming, and his family was wealthy. But he chose to date Mihaela. When she was 21, the young couple married. Mihaela felt that God had showered her with approval by allowing her to marry such a desirable man.

The young couple often visited their families. While Mihaela's parents enjoyed a peaceful home filled with intellectual pursuits, her husband's family didn't enjoy close-knit family pleasures.

Mihaela's in-laws stopped supporting their son's studies when he married, so when Mihaela graduated, she took a job to help pay his tuition. She didn't have to work on Saturdays and usually spent the day doing housework. But she often found herself wrestling with her conscience over what her mother had taught her about proper Sabbath keeping.

As time passed and her husband still hadn't finished his studies, the young couple began having problems in their marriage. Often when a crisis came, she would pray that if God would help them resolve their problems, she would become an Adventist. But when the crisis passed, she forgot her promise.

When Mihaela's in-laws learned that her husband hadn't finished school when he said he had, they became angry with him and accused him of wasting his life and their money. Angry, he called Mihaela at work and told her that they were moving out of the apartment his parents had gotten them. "I'll quit school and provide for my family with my own hands!" he announced boldly.

Reluctantly, Mihaela returned home and packed up their things. They moved in with his sister, who lived in the same town. Mihaela continued working while her husband worked on obtaining visas to leave the country.

To be continued in next week's Inside Story.

Edited by NIKOLAUS SATELMAJER • JOHN MATHEWS

Giving is a volatile topic for most of us. But it is a biblical principle that needs more attention. For some, talking about faithful stewardship is like walking on thin ice. Reactions range from “All you want is my money!” to “Isn’t that trying to strike a bargain with God?” Where is the truth? Where is the blessing? Is there a balance?



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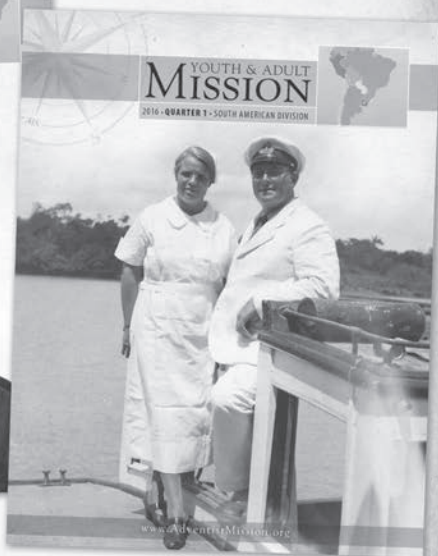
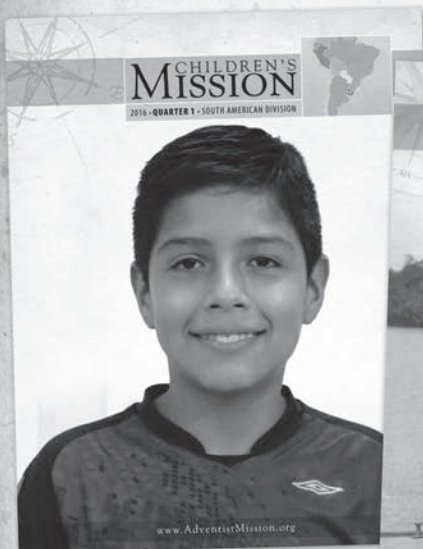


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Retributive Punishment



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Job 8:1–22, Isa. 40:12–14, Job 11:1–20, Gen. 6:5–8, 2 Pet. 3:5–7.*

Memory Text: “‘Can you search out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limits of the Almighty?’” (*Job 11:7, NKJV*).

The problem of human suffering surely continues to daunt humanity. We see “good” people suffer immense tragedy, while evil ones go unpunished in this life. A few years ago a book came out called *Why Do Bad Things Happen to Good People?* It was one of numerous attempts over the millennia to come to a satisfactory answer to that problem. It didn't. Many other writers and thinkers have written of their struggle to come to terms with human suffering. They don't seem to have found the right answers.

This theme, of course, is the theme of the book of Job, and in it we continue to explore why even “good” people, such as Job, suffer in this world. The crucial difference between the book of Job and the others, though, is that Job is not based on human perspectives of suffering (though we get plenty of that in the book); rather, because it's the Bible, we get a look at God's perspective on the problem.

This week we read more speeches from the men who came to Job in his misery. What can we learn from them, especially from their mistakes, as they try, as others have done, to come to grips with the problem of pain?

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 12.

More Accusations

As if getting a lecture from Eliphaz weren't bad enough, Job then faced one from Bildad, who said something similar to what Eliphaz had said. Unfortunately, Bildad was cruder and harsher toward Job than even Eliphaz was. Imagine going up to someone whose children had died and saying to the person: " 'If your sons have sinned against Him, He has cast them away for their transgression' " (*Job 8:4, NKJV*).

This is ironic, because the first chapter of Job (*Job 1:5*) makes it clear that Job offered sacrifices on behalf of his children for that very reason, in case they had sinned. So we see a contrast here between an understanding of grace (as seen in Job's actions) and Bildad's opening words, which reveal a harsh, retributive legalism. Even worse, though, is that Bildad speaks this way in his attempt to defend the character of God.

Read Job 8:1–22. What is Bildad's argument, and how much truth is he speaking? That is, if you were to forget the immediate context and just look at the sentiments expressed, what fault, if any, could you find with his words?

Who can find fault with so much of what he is saying here? " 'For we were born yesterday, and know nothing, because our days on earth are a shadow' " (*Job 8:9, NKJV*). That's powerful, true, and very biblical (*James 4:14*). Or what's wrong with his warning that the godless man who puts his hope in earthly, worldly things is really trusting in something no firmer than a "spider's web" (*Job 8:14*)? That's about as biblical a thought as one could get.

Perhaps the biggest problem is that Bildad is presenting just one aspect of God's character. It's an example of being in a ditch on one side of the road or the other. Neither place is where you really should be. Someone can, for instance, focus only on law and justice and obedience, while someone else can focus on grace and forgiveness and substitution. Either overemphasis usually leads to a distorted picture of God and of truth. We see a similar problem here.

As humans we should always strive for the right balance between law and grace in our theology and in our dealing with others. If, however, you were to err on one side or the other (and as humans we eventually do), which side would it be better to err on when dealing with the faults of others, and why?

Less Than Your Iniquity Deserves

“‘Can you search out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limits of the Almighty? They are higher than heaven—what can you do? Deeper than Sheol—what can you know? Their measure is longer than the earth and broader than the sea’ ” (*Job 11:7–9, NKJV; see also Isa. 40:12–14*).

What truth is being expressed, and why is it important for us always to remember it?

The words here are beautiful expressions of the fact that there is so much about God we don't know and that all of our efforts to search Him out by ourselves will still leave us knowing so little. It's interesting that one of the twentieth century's most famous philosophers, the late Richard Rorty, basically argued that we are never going to understand reality and truth, and so we ought to give up the attempt. Instead of trying to understand reality, Rorty argued, all we can do is try to cope with it. How fascinating: 2,600 years of the Western philosophical tradition culminates in this expression of defeat. If all our searching leaves us in the dark about the nature of the reality that we live in, then who “by searching” is going to understand the Creator—the one who made that reality to begin with, and so is even greater than it? Rorty essentially affirmed what we just read from the Bible.

Yet these texts, profound as they are, were from a speech from Zophar, the third of Job's acquaintances, and he used those words as part of a faulty argument against Job.

Read Job 11:1–20. What is right with what Zophar is saying, but what is wrong with his overall argument?

It's so hard to understand how someone could come up to a man suffering as Job is and say to him, basically, *you are getting what you deserve. No, in fact, you are getting less than you deserve.* What's even worse is that he is doing it, as were the two others, all in an attempt to vindicate the goodness and the character of God.

Sometimes, merely knowing truths about the character of God does not automatically make us reflect it. What more do we need in order to reflect God's character?

Divine Retribution

Job's three friends undoubtedly had some knowledge about God. And they were earnest in their efforts to defend Him too. And, as we saw, as misguided as their words to Job were (especially given the context), these men were expressing some crucial truths.

Central to their arguments was the idea that God is a God of justice, and that sin brings divine retributive punishment upon evil and special blessings upon goodness. Though we don't know the exact time that the men lived, we accept that Moses wrote the book of Job while he was in Midian, so they lived some time before the Exodus. Most likely, too, they lived after the Flood.

Read Genesis 6:5–8. Though we don't know how much these men (Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar) knew about the Flood, how might its story have influenced their theology?

Clearly the story of the Flood is an example of divine retribution for sin. In it, God brings punishment directly upon those who specifically deserved it. Yet, even here the concept of grace is revealed as seen in Genesis 6:8. Ellen G. White wrote, too, of the fact that “every [hammer] blow struck upon the ark was preaching to the people.”—*The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 1, p. 70. Nevertheless, to some degree we can see in this story an example of what these men were preaching to Job.

How is this same idea of retributive judgment seen in Genesis 13:13; 18:20–32; 19:24, 25?

Whether or not Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar knew much about these incidents, they reveal the reality of God's direct judgment upon evil. God wasn't simply abandoning sinners to their sin and letting that sin itself destroy them. As with the Flood, God was the direct agent of their punishment. He functioned here as the judge and destroyer of wickedness and evil.

However much we want to (and should) focus on God's character of love, grace, and forgiveness, why must we not forget the reality of His justice as well? Think about all the evil that has yet gone unpunished. What should this tell us about the necessity of divine retribution, whenever and however it comes?

If the Lord Creates a New Thing

Many instances of direct divine punishment upon evil, as well as blessing for faithfulness, are recorded in Scripture long after all the characters in the book of Job were dead.

What great promise is given here for obedience? *Deut. 6:24, 25.*

The Old Testament is filled with promise after promise of the blessings and prosperity that God would directly bring to His people were they to obey Him. So, we can see here examples of what these men had said to Job regarding God's blessing the faithfulness of those who seek to obey Him and His commandments and to live a godly and upright life.

Of course, the Old Testament also is filled with warning after warning about direct divine punishment that would come for disobedience. In much of the Old Testament, especially after the covenant with Israel at Sinai, God is warning the Israelites about what their disobedience would bring upon them. " 'But if you do not obey the LORD, and if you rebel against [His] commands, [His] hand will be against you, as it was against your ancestors' " (*1 Sam. 12:15, NIV*).

Read Numbers 16:1–33. What does this incident teach about the reality of divine retributive punishment?

Given the nature of how the rebels were destroyed, this incident cannot be chalked up to the idea of "sin bringing its own punishment." These people faced divine and direct retribution from God for their sin and rebellion. In this case we see supernatural manifestations of God's power; it seemed that the very laws of nature themselves were changed. " 'But if the LORD creates a new thing, and the earth opens its mouth and swallows them up with all that belongs to them, and they go down alive into the pit, then you will understand that these men have rejected the LORD' " (*Num. 16:30, NKJV*).

The verb "creates" here is from the same root used for "created" in Genesis 1:1. The Lord wanted everyone to know that it was He Himself who immediately and directly brought this punishment upon the rebels.

The Second Death

Certainly the greatest and most powerful manifestation of retributive judgment will be at the end of time, with the destruction of the wicked, called in the Bible “the second death” (*Rev. 20:14*). This death, of course, must not be confused with the death common to all the descendants of Adam. This is the death from which the Second Adam, Jesus Christ, will spare the righteous at the end of time (*1 Cor. 15:26*). In contrast, the second death, like some of the other punishments seen in Old Testament times, is God’s direct punishment upon sinners who have not repented and received salvation in Jesus.

Read 2 Peter 3:5–7. What is the Word of God telling us about the fate of the lost?

“Fire comes down from God out of heaven. The earth is broken up. The weapons concealed in its depths are drawn forth. Devouring flames burst from every yawning chasm. The very rocks are on fire. The day has come that shall burn as an oven. The elements melt with fervent heat, the earth also, and the works that are therein are burned up. Malachi 4:1; 2 Peter 3:10. The earth’s surface seems one molten mass—a vast, seething lake of fire. It is the time of the judgment and perdition of ungodly men—‘the day of the Lord’s vengeance, and the year of recompenses for the controversy of Zion.’ Isaiah 34:8.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 672, 673.

Though sin can bring its own punishment, there surely are times that God Himself does directly punish sin and sinners, as Job’s protagonists argued. It’s true that all suffering in this world has arisen from sin. But it’s not true that all suffering is God’s punishing of sin. That was certainly not the case with Job, nor in most other cases as well. The fact is that we are involved in the great controversy, and we have an enemy who is out to do us harm. The good news is that, amid it all, we can know that God is there for us. Whatever the reasons for the trials we face, whatever the present outcomes of those trials, we have the assurance of God’s love, a love revealed as so great that Jesus went to the cross for us, an act that alone promises to end all suffering.

How can we be sure that someone’s suffering is direct punishment from God? If we can’t be sure, then what’s the best approach for us to take with that suffering person? Or even with our own suffering?

Further Thought: As said earlier in this quarter, it's important to try to put ourselves in the place of the characters in the story, because doing so can help us to understand their motives and actions. They didn't see the battle going on behind the scenes as we do. If we put ourselves in their shoes, it shouldn't be that hard for us to see the mistake that Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar made in regard to Job's suffering. They were making a judgment that they were really not qualified to make. "It is very natural for human beings to think that great calamities are a sure index of great crimes and enormous sins; but men often make a mistake in thus measuring character. We are not living in the time of retributive judgment. Good and evil are mingled, and calamities come upon all. Sometimes men do pass the boundary line beyond God's protecting care, and then Satan exercises his power upon them, and God does not interpose. Job was sorely afflicted, and his friends sought to make him acknowledge that his suffering was the result of sin, and cause him to feel under condemnation. They represented his case as that of a great sinner; but the Lord rebuked them for their judgment of His faithful servant."—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p. 1140. We need to be careful in how we deal with the whole question of suffering. Sure, in some cases *it seems* easier to understand. Someone smokes cigarettes and gets lung cancer. How much simpler could it be? That's fine, but what about those who smoke all their lives and never get it? Is God punishing the one but not the other? In the end, like Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, we don't always know why suffering comes as it does. In one sense, it almost doesn't matter if we know or not. What matters is what we do in response to the suffering that we see. Here's where these three men were totally wrong.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 What does the reality of retributive punishment teach us about how we can trust in the ultimate justice of God, even despite how things seem now?
- 2 These three men really didn't understand all that was happening to Job in his suffering. In a sense, isn't that the case with us all? We don't fully understand the reasons for human suffering. How, then, should this realization help us to be more compassionate with those who are suffering? As stated above, how important is it that we even know the immediate causes?

Beautiful in God's Time: Part 2

While Mihaela worked and kept house, her husband neither worked nor studied. One day he told her that he had received a visa to go to Spain, but hers hadn't yet come. So he went to Spain without her.

Mihaela lived with her in-laws after her husband left. She had plenty of time on her hands, so she began reading Adventist literature that her mother had given her. Finally her visa came, and she planned to join her husband. She promised God that if they could be reunited, she would be baptized at the first opportunity.

When Mihaela arrived in Spain, she moved into the apartment she and her husband would share with two other families and a single woman. She was delighted to find that one of the families was Adventist, and they had been taking her husband to church. Joyfully the couple began attending church together.

Mihaela found work as a nanny, which required that she be away from home from Monday morning until Friday evening. She lived for the weekends, when she could be with her husband.

Things seemed to be going well for the couple. Her husband had found work, and she looked forward to being able to afford their own apartment soon.

Then one by one people began telling Mihaela that her husband was spending too much time with the single woman who lived in the same apartment. Mihaela noticed that the two seemed quite friendly, but they denied any secret relationship.

Then her husband's interest in attending church waned. He began asking Mihaela to cook or go shopping with him on Sabbath. When she refused, he threatened to take the other woman instead. Finally, she gave in and went shopping with her husband and the other woman. She was miserable and decided she wouldn't give in to his threats again.

The following week the Adventist pastor visited, and Mihaela told him she wanted to be baptized. Later that week her husband's boss confirmed that her husband and the other woman were more than just friends. Mihaela confronted the woman, who admitted it was true.

Mihaela couldn't return to the apartment, so she asked her employers if she could stay in their home on the weekends as well.

In spite of losing her husband to another woman, Mihaela has found joy in her constant friend, Jesus, who has given her faith and the strength to deal with her broken marriage. She rejoices to see how God is working in her life, and her parents are happy that she has committed her life to Christ in baptism.

MIHAELA BUDAU *lives in Coslada, Spain.*

Innocent Blood



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Job 10, Isa. 53:6, Rom. 3:10–20, Job 15:14–16, Job 1:18–20, Matt. 6:34.*

Memory Text: “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (*Hebrews 11:1*).

Algerian-born writer Albert Camus struggled with the question of human suffering. In his book *The Plague*, he used a plague as a metaphor for the ills that bring pain and suffering upon humanity. He depicted a scene in which a little boy, afflicted with the pestilence, dies a horrific death. Afterward a priest, who had been a witness to the tragedy, said to a doctor who had been there too: “That sort of thing is revolting because it passes our human understanding. But perhaps we should love what we cannot understand.” The doctor, enraged, snapped back: “No, Father. I’ve a very different idea of love. And until my dying day, I shall refuse to love a scheme of things in which children are put to torture.”—Albert Camus, *The Plague* (New York: First Vintage International Edition, 1991), p. 218.

This scene reflects what we have seen in Job: pat and lame answers to what doesn’t have a simple solution. Job knew, as did the doctor here, that the answers given didn’t fit the reality at hand. Thus, that’s the challenge: How do we find answers that make sense of what so often seems without sense? This week we will continue the pursuit.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 19.

Job's Protest

Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar had a point: God does punish evil. Unfortunately, that point didn't apply in Job's situation. Job's suffering was not a case of retributive punishment. God was not punishing him for his sins, as He would do with Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. Nor was Job reaping what he had sown, as can so often be the case. No, Job was a righteous man; God Himself says so (*see Job 1:8*), and so Job not only didn't deserve what had happened to him, he knew that he didn't deserve it. That's what made his complaints so hard and bitter.

Read Job 10. What is he saying here to God, and why does it make so much sense, considering his circumstances?

At times of great tragedy, have not those who believe in God asked similar questions? *Why, Lord, did You bother to create me at all? Or, Why are You doing this to me? Or, Would it not have been better that I had never been born than to have been created and face this?*

Again, what makes it all harder for Job to comprehend is that he knows that he has been faithful to God. He cries out to Him: " 'Although You know that I am not wicked, and there is no one who can deliver from Your hand' " (*Job 10:7, NKJV*).

There's a difficult irony here: in contrast to what his friends said, Job was not suffering because of his sin. The book itself teaches the opposite: *Job was suffering here precisely because he was so faithful.* The first two chapters of the book make that point. Job had no way of knowing that this was the cause, and even if he did, it probably would have made his bitterness and frustration worse.

However unique Job's situation, it's also universal in that it is dealing with the universal question of suffering, especially when the suffering seems so greatly out of proportion to whatever evil someone might have done. It's one thing to go over the speed limit and get a speeding ticket; it's another to do the same thing to kill someone in the process.

What can you say to someone who believes that he or she is suffering unjustly?

Innocent Blood?

We often hear the question of “innocent” suffering. The Bible even uses the phrase “innocent blood” (*Isa. 59:7, Jer. 22:17, Joel 3:19*), usually in the context of assault, or even murder, of people who didn’t deserve what happened to them. If we use this understanding of “innocent blood,” then, as we all know, our world is filled with many examples of it.

On the other hand, the Bible does talk about the reality of human sinfulness and human corruption, which brings up a valid question about the meaning of “innocent.” If everyone has sinned, if everyone has violated God’s law, then who is truly innocent? As someone once said, “Your birth certificate is proof of your guilt.”

Though theologians and Bible scholars for centuries have debated the exact nature of the human relationship to sin, the Bible is clear that sin has impacted all humanity. The idea of human sinfulness is not found only in the New Testament. On the contrary, the New Testament exploration of the theme expands on what was written in the Old Testament.

What do the following texts teach about the reality of sin? *1 Kings 8:46, Ps. 51:5, Prov. 20:9, Isa. 53:6, Rom. 3:10–20.*

Besides the clear testimony of Scripture, anyone who has ever known the Lord personally, who has seen a glimpse of God’s goodness and holiness, knows the reality of human sinfulness. In that sense, who among us (we’re going to skip, for now, the whole question of babies and young children) is truly “innocent”?

On the other hand, that’s not really the point. Job was a sinner; in that sense he wasn’t innocent, any more than his own children weren’t innocent. And yet, what had he done, or they done, to deserve the fate that befell them? Is this not, perhaps, the ultimate question for humanity in regard to suffering? Contrary to his friends’ “defenses of clay” (*Job 13:12, NKJV*), Job knew that what was happening to him was not something that he deserved.

How does the experience of knowing God and His holiness, which makes our own sinfulness painful, help us to see our absolute need of the Cross?

Unfair Fates

Read Job 15:14–16. What truth is Eliphaz presenting to Job?

Again, Eliphaz was speaking truth (as did the others), this time in regard to the sinfulness of all humanity. Sin is a universal fact of life on earth; so is suffering. And as we also know, all human suffering ultimately results from sin. And there's no question that God can use suffering to teach us important lessons. "God has always tried His people in the furnace of affliction. It is in the heat of the furnace that the dross is separated from the true gold of the Christian character."—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 129.

There is, however, a deeper problem with suffering. What about the times we see no good come from it? What about the suffering of those who don't have the dross separated from the gold in their character because they are killed instantly? What about those who suffer, never knowing the true God or anything about Him? What about those whose sufferings only made them bitter, angry, and hateful toward God? We can't ignore these examples or try to put them in a simple formula; to do so would perhaps make us guilty of the same errors as Job's accusers.

Also, what good arises from the fate of animals in a forest fire who are slowly burned alive in a horrible death? Or what about the thousands of people killed in a natural disaster? Or what about civilians in war? What possible lessons could they have learned, or their families, when their families were swept away with them? And one could reasonably ask questions not just about Job's ten dead children but about his servants who were killed with "the edge of the sword" (*Job 1:15*) or those burned alive by "the fire of God" (*Job 1:16*) or the other servants killed "with the edge of the sword" (*Job 1:17*).

Whatever lesson Job and his accusers might learn, and whatever defeat Satan will face through Job's faithfulness, the fate of these others certainly doesn't seem fair. The fact is, these things are not fair, are not just, and not right.

We face similar challenges today. A six-year-old dies of cancer, and that's fair? A 20-year-old college girl is pulled from her car and sexually assaulted, and that's fair? A 35-year-old mother of three is killed in a car accident, and that's fair? What about the 19,000 Japanese killed in the 2011 Tohoku earthquake? Were all 19,000 guilty of something that made this a just punishment? If not, then their deaths were not fair either.

These are the hard questions.

Sufficient for the Day . . .

Read the following verses and think about the immediate fate of those depicted in the texts. Then ask yourself the question: How fairly was life treating them?

Job 1:18–20 _____

Gen. 4:8 _____

Exod. 12:29, 30 _____

2 Sam. 11:17 _____

Jer. 38:6 _____

Matt. 14:10 _____

Heb. 11:35–38 _____

The Bible reflects a harsh fact about life in our fallen world: evil and suffering are real. It's only a superficial reading of the Word of God, pulling a few texts out of the whole context, that could give anyone the idea that life here is fair and just and good, and that if only we remain faithful to God, suffering won't come. Certainly faithfulness can reap great rewards now, but that doesn't mean it provides an absolute barrier to suffering and pain. Just ask Job.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus gave a powerful homily on why we need to trust God and not to worry about what we will eat, or drink, or wear. And Jesus used examples from nature as object lessons on why we can trust in God's goodness to meet our needs. He then included these famous words: "Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof" (*Matt. 6:34*).

Notice, *sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof*. Jesus wasn't denying the presence in our lives, even the *daily* presence, of evil (from a Greek word that can mean "badness," "depravity," and "malignity"). If anything, He was doing the opposite. He was acknowledging the prevalence and presence of evil in our daily lives. How could He not? As the Lord, He knew more about the evil in the world than any of us ever could, and all of us certainly know a lot about it already.

Who hasn't tasted a bit (or maybe a lot) of just how unfair and bitter life can be? How can focusing on Jesus' acknowledgment of this evil's reality help to give us comfort and strength amid it?

Things Not Seen

Read Proverbs 3:5. Though it is such a common text, what crucial message does it have for us, especially in the context of what we have been studying?

Though the case of Job is extreme, it does reflect the sad reality of human suffering in our fallen world. We don't need the story of Job or even the other stories we can read in the Bible to see this reality. We see it all around us. Indeed, to some degree, we all live it.

“Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble. He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down: he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not” (*Job 14:1, 2*).

So again, the question we struggle with is how do we account for suffering, the kind that seems to make no sense to us, that kind in which innocent blood is shed?

As the early chapters of Job have shown, and as the Bible elsewhere reveals, Satan is a real being and is the cause, directly or indirectly, of so much suffering. As we have seen early in this quarter (see Lesson 2), the great controversy template works well in helping us to deal with the reality of evil in our world.

Still, it's hard to understand at times why things happen that do take place. Sometimes—many times, actually—things just don't make sense. It's at times like these, when things happen that we don't understand, that we need to learn to trust in the goodness of God. We need to learn to trust God, even when answers are not readily apparent and when we can see nothing good coming from the evil and suffering around us.

Hebrews 11:1 reads: “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” From the things that we do see, how can we learn to trust God about the things that we don't see? From what we have read in the book of Job so far, in what sense has Job learned to do just that? How can we learn to do the same?

Further Thought: Last Sabbath's introduction began with Albert Camus, who wrote a lot about his struggle for answers, not just to the question of suffering but to the question of life's meaning in general, which suffering made only more problematic. As with most atheists, he didn't make much headway. His most famous quote shows how little: "There is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide. Judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy."—*The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays* (New York: Vintage Books, 1955), p. 3. For sure, the question of human suffering is not an easy one to answer. The book of Job pulls back a veil and shows us a bigger picture than what we might have seen otherwise, but even when we read it all, the book still leaves many questions unanswered.

There is, however, a crucial difference between those who struggle for answers to the question of suffering without God and those who do so with God. Yes, the problem of pain and suffering becomes more difficult when you believe in the existence of God, because of the inevitable problems His existence in the face of evil and pain bring. On the other hand, we have what atheists such as Camus don't have—and that is the prospect of answer and of resolution. (There is evidence that Camus later in life had wanted to be baptized but he was killed in a car accident.) We have the hope that "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away" (*Rev. 21:4*). Even if someone didn't believe this promise or many of the others in the Bible, that person would have to admit, if nothing else, how much nicer life would be now, to have at least that hope, as opposed to the prospect of just living here amid our toils and struggles and then dying forever, with it all meaning nothing.

Discussion Question:

① One argument that people bring up in regard to the question of evil is the idea that, *Well, yes, there is evil in the world, but there also is good, and the good outweighs the evil.* The first question would be, *How does one know that the good outweighs the evil? How does one make that comparison?* The second question would be, *Even if true, what good would that idea do for Job (or others) amid their suffering?* German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer used a powerful example to debunk that whole notion of some sort of balance between good and evil in this world now. "The pleasure in this world," he wrote, "it has been said, outweighs the pain; or, at any rate, there is an even balance between the two. If the reader wishes to see shortly whether this statement is true, let him compare the respective feelings of two animals, one of which is engaged in eating the other." How would you respond to the idea that good somehow balances out the evil?

The Devil's Lies: Part 1

Rui lived with his grandparents in Portugal. When he was 7 years old, his grandparents died. Rui wanted to know what happened to people when they died, but his uncle, with whom he'd gone to live, didn't have the answers.

Rui began a long search for answers. He started by attending a Sunday School near his uncle's home. Hoping to find answers to his spiritual questions there, he often recited the prayers he had memorized, but he couldn't seem to bridge the gap between himself and God.

Rui bought a Bible, hoping it would help him to understand God. But because he had been taught that common people can't understand it, he placed it on a shelf of honor and didn't read it.

Then one day he moved the Bible to clean the shelf. The Bible flipped open to Exodus 20. Rui noticed that the page heading said "The Ten Commandments." He sat down and read the chapter. He had memorized the Ten Commandments in church, but he was startled to find that the commandments in the Bible differed from those he had memorized.

That Sunday he asked the priest why the commandments he had learned in church differed from those in the Bible. He was disappointed when the priest simply told him to follow the commandments of the church and ignore the Bible version. Rui's frustration grew. He stopped attending the church, but the emptiness in his life remained.

Rui remembered hearing his relatives say that his grandmother used to speak to spirits. Rui wondered whether he had the same ability. Feeling frustrated because he couldn't find the answers to his spiritual questions in church, he decided to seek the answers from the dead.

He went to meetings to call on the spirits and soon began to sense a spiritual presence with him. Soon he was deeply involved in the spirit world. He found a book on witchcraft and began studying it. But some of the instructions were so horrifying that he destroyed everything he had that related to the spirits. He kept only his Bible.

Rui again began searching for answers about God. He attended several churches and asked many questions. But what they told him left him confused and frustrated.

To be continued in next week's Inside Story.

Intimations of Hope



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Prov. 17:28, Job 13:1–15, James 2:20–22, 1 Cor. 15:11–20, 1 Pet. 1:18–20, Gen. 22:8.*

Memory Text: “He also shall be my salvation, for a hypocrite could not come before Him” (*Job 13:16, NKJV*).

Man is the only animal,” wrote British essayist William Hazlitt, “that laughs and weeps; for he is the only animal that is struck with the difference between what things are, and what they ought to be.”

Things certainly aren't what they ought to be. However, for a Christian who lives with the promise of the Second Coming, there is hope—a great hope of what things will become (*2 Pet. 3:13*). They will become something so wonderful that we, with sin-darkened minds (*1 Cor. 13:12*), can barely imagine it now. This is a hope that the secular mind, in all its narrowness and parochialism, has lost long ago.

This week, as we continue to explore the question of suffering in the book of Job, we will find that, even amid the unfair tragedy that befell him, which made no sense and was not justified, Job could still utter words of hope.

What was that hope, and what does it tell us that we can hope in as well?

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 26.

Forgers of Lies

“Even a fool who keeps silent is considered wise; when he closes his lips, he is deemed intelligent” (*Prov. 17:28, RSV*).

Whatever one wants to say about the man Job, one can't say that he was going to sit there amid his sorrow and quietly listen to what his friends were throwing at him. On the contrary, much of the book of Job consists of Job's fighting back against what he knows is a mixture of truth and error. As we saw, these men were not showing much tact and sympathy; they were claiming to speak for God in justifying what had happened to Job; and basically they said he was getting what he deserved or that he deserved even worse! Any one of these lines of thought would have been bad enough; but all three (and others) were too much, and Job answered them back.

Read Job 13:1–14. What approach is Job taking here as he responds to what is being said to him?

We saw in chapter 2 that when these men first came and saw Job, they said nothing to him for seven days. Considering what eventually did start coming out of their mouths, this might have been the best approach. That's certainly what Job thought.

Notice also: Job says that not only are these men talking lies, they are talking lies about God. (That's interesting in light of what happens toward the end of the book itself. [See *Job 42:7*.] Surely it would be better not to speak than to say things that are wrong. (Who among us hasn't experienced how true that is?) But it seems that to say things that are wrong about God is much worse. The irony, of course, was that these men actually thought they were defending God and His character against Job's bitter complaints about what happened. Though Job remained at a loss to understand why all these things came upon him, he knew enough to recognize that what these men were saying made them “forgers of lies” (*Job 13:4*).

When was the last time you said things that were wrong and that shouldn't have been said? How can you learn from that experience so that you do not make the same kind of mistake again?

Though He Slay Me

When we started this quarter, we went right to the end of the book, and we saw how well things eventually turned out for Job. We saw that, even amid his terrible suffering, Job really had something to hope for. In fact, living when we do and knowing the end of the whole book, i.e., the Bible, we can see that Job had a whole lot more to hope in than he could possibly have imagined at the time.

But when his children died, his property was taken, and his health was ruined, Job didn't have the advantage of knowing how things would turn out. What he knew, instead, was that life had suddenly turned nasty.

At the same time, even amid his bitter laments about wishing he hadn't been born or wishing that he had gone from the womb to the grave, Job still expressed hope, and this hope was in God—the same God who he thought was dealing so unfairly with him now.

Read Job 13:15. What hope is presented here in this verse? What is Job saying?

“Even if He will kill me, I will trust Him.” What a powerful affirmation of faith! With all that had happened to him, Job knew that very possibly the final thing, the only thing that hadn't happened to him, death, could come—and God could cause it too. Yet, even if this happened, Job would die trusting in the Lord anyway.

“The riches of the grace of Christ must be kept before the mind. Treasure up the lessons that his love provides. Let your faith be like Job's, that you may declare, ‘Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.’ Lay hold on the promises of your Heavenly Father, and remember his former dealings with you and with his servants; for ‘all things work together for good to them that love God.’ ”—Ellen G. White, *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, October 20, 1910.

From a purely human perspective, Job had no reason to hope for anything. But the fact was, Job wasn't looking from a purely human perspective. If he had done so, what hope could he possibly have? Instead, when he makes this amazing affirmation of faith and hope, he does it in the context of God and of trusting in Him.

A logical question could be: How did Job retain his faith in God amid all that had happened to him? Read Job 1:1 and James 2:20–22. How do they help answer this question, and what should the answer tell us about the importance of faithfulness and obedience in our Christian life? (See lesson 13.)

Intimations of Hope

“ ‘He also shall be my salvation, for a hypocrite could not come before Him’ ” (*Job 13:16, NKJV*). This verse follows right after the one we read yesterday. How does it affirm even more the idea that, despite everything, Job had hope, and that his hope was in God?

What an interesting line to follow what came before. Even if Job were to die, *even if God killed him*, Job still trusted in his God for salvation. Though on one level it’s a strange contrast, on another it makes perfect sense. After all, what is salvation other than liberation from death? And what is death, at least for the saved, other than a quick moment of rest, an instant of sleep, followed by the resurrection to eternal life? Is not this hope of the resurrection to eternal life the great hope of all of God’s people through the millennia? This was Job’s hope, as well.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:11–20. What is the hope presented to us there? Without this hope, why would we have no hope at all?

Also, after this strong affirmation in salvation, Job says that the “*hanef* will not come before Him.” The root means “profane” or “godless,” a word with very negative connotations in Hebrew. Job knew that his salvation was to be found only in God, only in a life surrendered in faithful obedience to Him. That’s why the evil and godless man, the *hanef*, didn’t have that hope. Most likely Job was expressing what he understood as his “assurance of salvation.” Though Job faithfully offered animal sacrifices for sin, we don’t know how much he understood of their significance. Before the Cross, most faithful followers of the Lord, such as Job, surely didn’t have as full an understanding of salvation as we can have living after the Cross. Nevertheless, Job still knew enough to know that his hope of salvation was to be found only in the Lord and that those sacrifices were an expression of how this salvation was to be found.

Hope Before the World Began

Who among us, having gone through what Job did, could utter such a powerful affirmation of hope? His words are an eternal testimony to the reality of his life of faith and obedience.

Job had hope because he served a God of hope. Even amid all the sordid stories of human sinfulness, from the fall of Adam and Eve in Eden (*Genesis 3*) to the fall of Babylon at the end of time (*Rev. 14:8*), the Bible is a book brimming with hope, brimming with a vision of something beyond what this world itself offers.

“The world has been committed to Christ, and through Him has come every blessing from God to the fallen race. He was the Redeemer before as after His incarnation. As soon as there was sin, there was a Saviour.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 210. And who is the Savior other than the great Source of our hope?

How do these texts affirm the wonderful hope expressed in the Ellen G. White statement found in today’s study? *Eph. 1:4; Titus 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:8, 9; 1 Pet. 1:18–20.*

These texts teach the amazing truth that, in His foreknowledge, God knew even before the Creation of the world that humanity would fall into sin. The Greek in 2 Timothy 1:9 says that we have been called by a grace given to us in Christ Jesus “before eternal time.” This is a grace given us, “not according to our works” (how could it have been “our works” if we didn’t even exist then?) but through Jesus. Even before we existed, God put a plan in place that offered humanity the hope of eternal life. The hope didn’t arise after we needed it; instead, it was already there, ready for us when we did need it.

As Christians, we have so much to hope for and to hope in. We exist in a universe created by a God who loves us (*John 3:16*), a God who redeemed us (*Titus 2:14*), a God who hears our prayers (*Matt. 6:6*), a God who intercedes for us (*Heb. 7:25*), a God who promises never to forsake us (*Heb. 13:5*), a God who promises to raise our bodies from death (*Isa. 26:19*), and to give us eternal life with Him (*John 14:2, 3*).

“What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?” (*Rom. 8:31*). How can you make this hope your own even amid whatever struggles you are facing now?

Images of Hope

Read the following texts. What hope does each of them reveal?

Gen. 3:15 _____

Gen. 22:8 _____

Lev. 17:11 _____

John 1:29 _____

Gal. 2:16 _____

Phil. 1:6 _____

1 Cor. 10:13 _____

Dan. 7:22 _____

Dan. 12:1, 2 _____

Matt. 24:27 _____

Dan. 2:44 _____

Follow the progression of thought presented in these texts. Together, what do they tell us about the hope that we as Christians can have in Jesus?

Further Thought: From cover to cover, the Bible is filled with wonderful words of hope. “ ‘These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world’ ” (*John 16:33, NKJV*). “ ‘I am with you always, even to the end of the age’ ” (*Matt. 28:20, NKJV*). “Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us” (*Gal. 3:13, NKJV*). “As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us” (*Psa. 103:12, NKJV*). “For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (*Rom. 8:38, 39, NKJV*). “ ‘The rainbow shall be in the cloud, and I will look on it to remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth’ ” (*Gen. 9:16, NKJV*). “Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him” (*1 John 3:1, NKJV*). “Know that the LORD, He is God; it is He who has made us, and not we ourselves; we are His people and the sheep of His pasture” (*Psa. 100:3, NKJV*). These texts are just a small portion of what is revealed to us in the Word about what our God is like and what He offers us. What reasons would we have for hope at all, were it not from what is revealed to us in the Bible?

Discussion Questions:

- 1 What other Bible texts speak to us of hope? Which ones are especially important to you, and why?
- 2 Of all the specific doctrines of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, which ones do you find especially hopeful?
- 3 Amid the personal trials and sometimes tragedies and hardships of life, how can we learn to rejoice in the hope that is presented to us in the Bible? Why is it so easy to get discouraged by events, even with so much hope presented to us? What can we do, on a practical level, to keep this hope ever before us and to rejoice in it?
- 4 “Talk hope and faith and thanksgiving to God. Be cheerful, hopeful in Christ. Educate yourself to praise Him. This is a great remedy for diseases of the soul and of the body.”—Ellen G. White, *Mind, Character, and Personality*, vol. 2, p. 492. Why is praise so important in helping us to stay hopeful in the Lord?

The Devil's Lies: Part 2

Rui began reading the Bible on his own. In this way, he discovered references to the Sabbath day.

Rui knew that the Sabbath was Saturday, for the words are the same in Portuguese. But he didn't know of a church that worshiped on Saturday. Then a few weeks later, Rui heard a radio program during which the speaker offered free Bible studies. He enrolled and began studying the lessons.

Almost immediately, Rui began finding answers to the questions that had troubled him for so many years. But before he made a decision about what he was learning, Rui's study was interrupted when he met a young woman. Rui put aside the Bible studies and spent his time with his beloved. Eventually the couple married. At last, he felt fulfillment in his life.

But whenever the couple attended church, Rui felt the old conflicts arising in his heart. He no longer believed that Sunday was the biblical day of worship, and he now understood that the dead are asleep, not alive in some other place. These religious tensions spilled out into his family life, causing unrest and arguments. Rui feared that if he followed his convictions, his marriage might be over.

Rui learned that his wife's cousin was a Seventh-day Adventist and that the Bible studies he had taken were sponsored by Adventists. Suddenly, the questions he had asked all his life had answers. Everything fell into place. But still he faced a dilemma: What would his wife say if she knew of his interest in this church?

Rui began watching an Adventist television network while his wife wasn't home. When she went to visit her parents for several weeks, Rui attended the Adventist church. He found a spiritual home and was convinced that this was where God wanted him to be.

Rui struggled to tell his wife, and when he finally told her, she didn't take his religious fervor seriously. She had seen him struggle spiritually since they had met. But Rui knew that he had found what he was looking for. He studied further and then asked to be baptized. "I'm at peace," he says. "The devil's lies no longer plague me, for I have found the truth."

The Wrath of Elihu



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Job 13:28, Job 28:28, Job 32:1–5, Job 34:10–15, Ezek. 28:12–17, Job 1–2:10.*

Memory Text: “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts’ ” (*Isaiah 55:9, NKJV*).

And so it goes, the battle of words between Job and these three men, words that at times are profound, beautiful, deep, and true. How often people will quote from the book of Job, even quotes from Eliphaz, Bildad, or Zophar. And that’s because, as we have seen again and again, they did have a lot of good things to say. They just didn’t say them in the right place, at the right time, in the right circumstances. What this should teach us is the powerful truth of these texts in Proverbs 25:11–13:

A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold
In settings of silver.

Like an earring of gold and an ornament of fine gold
Is a wise rebuker to an obedient ear.

Like the cold of snow in time of harvest
Is a faithful messenger to those who send him,
For he refreshes the soul of his masters (*NKJV*).

Unfortunately, those weren’t the words that Job was hearing from his friends. In fact, the problem was going to get worse because, instead of just three people telling him he’s wrong, a new one comes on the scene.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 3.

Miserable Comforters

Even after Job's powerful expression of faith (*Job 13:15, 16*), the verbal sparring continued. Over the course of many chapters, the men go back and forth, arguing many deep and important questions about God, sin, death, justice, the wicked, wisdom, and the transient nature of humanity.

What truths are being expressed in the following texts?

Job 13:28 _____

Job 15:14–16 _____

Job 19:25–27 _____

Job 28:28 _____

Through all these chapters the arguments continued, neither side conceding its position. Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, each in his own way, each with his own agenda, didn't let up in the argument about how people get what they deserve in life; and thus, what came upon Job had to be just punishment for his sins. Job, meanwhile, continued to lament the cruel fate that had befallen him, certain that he did not deserve the suffering. Back and forth they sparred, each "comforter" accusing Job of uttering empty and vain words, and Job doing the same to them.

In the end, none of them, including Job, understood all that was going on. How could they? They were speaking from a very limited perspective, which all humans have. If we can get any lesson from the book of Job (one that should be obvious by now, especially after all the speeches of these men), it is that we as humans need humility when we profess to talk about God and the workings of God. We might know some truth, maybe even a lot of truth, but sometimes—as we can see with these three men—we might not necessarily know the best way to apply the truths that we know.

Look around at the natural world. Why does this alone show us how limited we are in what we know about even the simplest of things?

The Entrance of Elihu

From Job 26 to 31, the tragic hero of this story, Job, gives his final speech to the three men. Though eloquent and passionate, he basically repeats the argument he has been making all along: *I do not deserve what has been happening to me. Period.*

Again, Job represents much of humanity in that many people suffer things that they don't deserve. And the question, in many ways the hardest question of all, is—why? In some cases, the answer to suffering is relatively easy. People clearly bring the trouble on themselves. But so often, and especially in the case of Job, that's not what happened, and so the question of suffering remains.

As chapter 31 comes to a close, Job has been talking about the kind of life he led, a life in which nothing he had done justified what was happening to him now. Then the final verse of the chapter reads: "The words of Job are ended" (*Job 31:40*).

Read Job 32:1–5. What is happening here, and what is Elihu's charge against Job and the other men?

Here is the first time that this man, Elihu, is mentioned in the book of Job. He obviously heard some of the long discussions, though we are not told just when he appeared on the scene. He must have come later, because he was not mentioned as being with the other three when they first came. What we do know, however, is that he wasn't satisfied with the answers he had heard during whatever part of the dialogue he heard. In fact, we're told four times in these five verses that his "wrath" had been kindled over what he had heard. For the next six chapters, then, this man Elihu seeks to give his understanding and explanation of the issues that all these men confronted because of the calamity that struck Job.

Job 32:2 said that Elihu was angry with Job because he "justified himself rather than God," a distortion of Job's true position. What should this tell us about how we need to be careful in the ways that we interpret the words of others? How can we learn to try to put the best construction rather than the worst on what people say?

Elihu's Defense of God

A lot of commentary has been written over the ages about Elihu and his speech, some seeing it as a major turning point in the direction of the dialogue. Yet it's really not that easy to see where Elihu adds anything so new or so groundbreaking that it changes the dynamic of the dialogue. Instead, he seems largely to be giving the same arguments that the other three had done in their attempt to defend the character of God against the charge of unfairness in regard to the sufferings of Job.

Read Job 34:10–15. What truths is Elihu expressing here? How do they parallel what the other men have said before? And though his words were true, why were they inappropriate for the current situation?

Perhaps what we can see with Elihu, as with these other men, is fear—the fear that God is not what they think Him to be. They want to believe in the goodness and the justice and the power of God; and so, what does Elihu do but utter truths about the goodness, the justice, and the power of God?

“For His eyes are on the ways of man, and He sees all his steps. There is no darkness nor shadow of death where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves” (*Job 34:21, 22, NKJV*).

“Behold, God is mighty, but despises no one; He is mighty in strength of understanding. He does not preserve the life of the wicked, but gives justice to the oppressed. He does not withdraw His eyes from the righteous; but they are on the throne with kings, for He has seated them forever, and they are exalted” (*Job 36:5–7, NKJV*).

“As for the Almighty, we cannot find Him; He is excellent in power, in judgment and abundant justice; He does not oppress. Therefore men fear Him; He shows no partiality to any who are wise of heart” (*Job 37:23, 24, NKJV*).

If all this is true, then the only logical conclusion one must draw is that Job is getting what he deserves. What else could it be? Elihu, then, was trying to protect his own understanding of God in the face of such terrible evil befalling such a good man as Job.

Have you ever faced a time when something happened that made you fearful for your faith? How did you respond? Looking back, what might you have done differently?

The Irrationality of Evil

All four of these men, believers in God, believers in a God of justice, found themselves in a dilemma: how to explain Job's situation in a rational and logical manner that was consistent with their understanding of the character of God. Unfortunately, they ended up taking a position that turned out basically wrong in their attempt to understand evil, or at least the evil that befell Job.

Ellen G. White offers a powerful comment in this regard. "It is impossible to explain the origin of sin so as to give a reason for its existence. . . . Sin is an intruder, for whose presence no reason can be given. It is mysterious, unaccountable; to excuse it is to defend it. Could excuse for it be found, or cause be shown for its existence, it would cease to be sin."—*The Great Controversy*, pp. 492, 493.

Though she uses the word *sin*, suppose we replaced that word with another word, one that has a similar meaning: *evil*. Then the quote could read: *It is impossible to explain the origin of evil so as to give a reason for its existence. . . . Evil is an intruder, for whose presence no reason can be given. It is mysterious, unaccountable; to excuse it is to defend it. Could excuse for it be found, or cause be shown for its existence, it would cease to be evil.*

So often when tragedy strikes, people will say or think: "I don't understand this." Or "This doesn't make sense." This is precisely what Job's complaint had been about all along.

There is a good reason that Job and his friends can't make sense of it: evil itself doesn't make sense. If we could understand it, if it made sense, if it fit into some logical and rational plan, then it wouldn't be that evil, it wouldn't be that tragic, because it would serve a rational purpose.

Look at these verses about the fall of Satan and the origin of evil. How much sense does his fall make (*Ezek. 28:12–17*)?

Here's a perfect being, created by a perfect God, in a perfect environment. He's exalted, full of wisdom, perfect in beauty, covered in precious stones, an "anointed cherub" who was in the "holy mountain of God." And yet, even with all that and having been given so much, this being corrupted himself and allowed evil to take over. What could have been more irrational and illogical than the evil that came to infect the devil?

What is your own experience with how irrational and inexplicable evil is?

The Challenge of Faith

Certainly the primary characters in the book of Job, as mere mortals seeing “through a glass darkly” (*1 Cor. 13:12*), were working from a very limited perspective, a very limited understanding of the nature of the physical world, much less the spiritual one. Interesting, too, that in all these debates about the evil that befell Job, none of the men, Job included, discussed the role of the devil—the direct and immediate cause of all of Job’s ills. And yet, despite their own confidence about how right they were, especially Elihu (*see Job 36:1–4*), their attempts to explain Job’s suffering rationally all fell short. And, of course, Job knew that their attempts failed.

Even with our understanding of the story’s cosmic background, how well are we able to rationalize and explain the evil that befell Job? Read Job 1–2:10 again. Even with all this revealed to us, what other questions remain?

With the opening chapters of Job before us, we have a view of things that none of these men did. Nevertheless, even now the issues remain hard to understand. As we saw, far from his evil bringing this suffering to him, it was precisely Job’s *goodness* that caused God to point him out to the devil. So, the man’s goodness and desire to be faithful to God led this to happen to him? How do we understand this? And even if Job had known what was going on, wouldn’t he have cried out, “Please, God, use someone else. Give me back my children, my health, my property!” Job didn’t volunteer to be the guinea pig. Who would? So, how fair was all this to Job and to his family? Meanwhile, even though God won His challenge with the devil, we know the devil has not conceded defeat (*Rev. 12:12*); so, what was the purpose? And also, whatever good ultimately came out of what happened to Job, was it worth the death of all these people and all the suffering that Job went through? If these questions remain for us (though more answers are coming), imagine all the questions that Job had!

And yet, here’s one of the most important lessons we can take from the book of Job: that of living by faith and not by sight; that of trusting in God and staying faithful to Him even when, like Job, we cannot rationalize or explain why things happen as they do. We don’t live by faith when everything is fully and rationally explained. We live by faith when, like Job, we trust and obey God, even when we cannot make sense of what is happening around us.

What are the things you have to trust God for, even though you don’t understand them? How can you continue to build that trust, even when you don’t have answers?

Further Thought: In a discussion concerning the question of faith and reason, author John Hedley Brooke wrote about the German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) and his attempt to understand the limits of human knowledge, especially when it came to the working of God. For Kant, “the question of justifying the ways of God to man was one of faith, not of knowledge. As his example of an authentic stance in the face of adversity, Kant chose Job, who had been stripped of everything save a clear conscience. Submitting before a divine decree, he had been right to resist the advice of friends who had sought to rationalize his misfortune. The strength of Job’s position consisted in his knowing what he did not know: what God thought He was doing in piling misfortune upon him.”—*Science and Religion* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 207, 208. These men in the book of Job, and now Elihu, thought they could explain what happened to Job in a simple cause-and-effect relationship. The cause was Job’s sin; the effect was his suffering. What could be more clear-cut, theologically sound, and rational than that? However, their reasoning was wrong, a powerful example of the fact that reality and the God who created and sustains that reality do not necessarily follow our understanding of how God and the world He created work.

Discussion Questions:

- ① As we saw, in all the long speeches about poor Job’s situation and why it happened, the devil was not once mentioned. Why is that so? What does it tell us about how limited these men were in their understanding, despite all the truths that they had? What could their ignorance teach us about our own, despite all the truths that we have?
- ② “When we take into our hands the management of things with which we have to do, and depend upon our own wisdom for success, we are taking a burden which God has not given us, and are trying to bear it without His aid. . . . But when we really believe that God loves us and means to do us good we shall cease to worry about the future. We shall trust God as a child trusts a loving parent. Then our troubles and torments will disappear, for our will is swallowed up in the will of God.”—Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, pp. 100, 101. How can we learn this kind of trust and faith? That is, what choices are we making now that will make our faith either stronger or weaker?

Doing God's Business: Part 1

This story is not about me. It's about what God is doing through me and what He can do through anyone who's willing to let Him use them.

I've always loved business. I founded my first company selling computers to schools when I was 21. From the beginning God was my partner, and He has blessed me so much.

Later, I bought a software franchise that grew fast. In five years, it grew from one employee to 50 and earned a lot of money. I gave a lot to missions, but I felt empty. Over time I realized that although I was supporting the church's mission, I wasn't personally involved in mission. My wife and I agreed that we needed to be a part of God's outreach to humanity.

Our business interests continued to grow, but I felt God leading me to sell the biggest company. I left the sale in God's hands, and the company sold quickly for more than I had expected.

I knew that God doesn't need my money, but I began to realize that what God wants from me is my time. Mission isn't something we do on Sabbath. It's something we do full time. I wanted to be personally involved in mission. So I asked God what He wanted me to do for Him.

One day as I was talking with a fellow Christian businessman, a member of Adventist-laymen's Services and Industries (ASI), I told him about my burden to be personally involved in an evangelistic mission project. I didn't care where the project was, I just wanted to be God's hands. I asked him if he had any ideas for such a project. He said that he'd think about it.

Just then his phone rang, and he excused himself to take the call. When he returned, he told me that the call was from a church leader who told him about a project that's in a country that isn't open to evangelism.

As he told me about the project, I realized that God was answering my prayer! The project was in a country I was familiar with. I knew the language and the culture of the people in that country, and as a businessman I could help the church leaders make it happen. I knew that I could travel there, a place that many others wouldn't be able to enter.

To be continued in next week's Inside Story.

Out of the Whirlwind



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: *Job 38–39, John 1:29, Matt. 16:13, 1 Cor. 1:18–27, Job 40:1–4, 42:1–6, Luke 5:1–8.*

Memory Text: “‘Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding.’” (*Job 38:4, NKJV*).

Whatever their differences, the characters in the book of Job had one thing in common: each had a lot to say about God, or at least about his understanding of God. And, as we have seen, much of what they said we could agree on. After all, who would argue with this: “‘But now ask the beasts, and they will teach you; and the birds of the air, and they will tell you; or speak to the earth, and it will teach you; and the fish of the sea will explain to you. Who among all these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this, in whose hand is the life of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind?’” (*Job 12:7–10, NKJV*)? Or with this: “‘Does God subvert judgment? Or does the Almighty pervert justice?’” (*Job 8:3, NKJV*)?

And while the context was Job’s suffering, the main focus of discussion was God. With the exception of the first two chapters, though, the Lord remained hidden, in the background, as the book progressed.

All that, however, was about to change. God Himself—the subject of so much discussion and debate in the book of Job—will now speak for Himself.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 10.

Out of the Whirlwind

Read Job 38:1. What happens here that is different from everything else in all the other dialogues?

Suddenly and unexpectedly, the Lord now appears in the book of Job, the first time since Job 2:6—“And the LORD said to Satan, ‘Behold, he is in your hand, but spare his life’ ” (NKJV).

Nothing really prepares the reader for this sudden appearance of God. Job 37 ends with Elihu’s speech, and the next thing we know, “the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind” (Job 38:1). Instantly it is just God and Job, as if the other men are irrelevant, at least for now.

The word *whirlwind* comes from a Hebrew word that means “storm” or “tempest,” and it has been used in connection with the appearance of God to humans (see Isa. 29:6, Zech. 9:14). It was also the word used in the context of Elijah’s being taken to heaven: “When the LORD was about to take Elijah up to heaven in a *whirlwind*, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal” (2 Kings 2:1, NIV; emphasis added).

Though we are not given any physical details about this “theophany” (a visible manifestation of God to humanity), it is clear that God isn’t speaking to Job in a “still small voice” (1 Kings 19:12). Instead, the Lord manifested Himself in a very powerful way, one that certainly got Job’s attention.

Of course, this wasn’t the only time God had revealed Himself to fallen humans. Again and again, the Scriptures show us the closeness of God to humanity.

What do these texts teach us about how near God can be to us? Gen. 15:1–6, Gen. 32:24–32, John 1:29.

The Bible teaches us the great and important truth that our God is not a distant God who created our world and then left us to ourselves. Instead, He is a God who closely interacts with us. No matter our sorrows, our troubles, or whatever we face in this life, we can have the assurance that God is near and that we can trust Him.

It’s one thing to believe intellectually in the nearness of God to us; it’s quite another to experience that nearness. How can you learn to draw close to God and to derive hope and comfort from this relationship?

God's Question

After what must have seemed to Job like a very long silence, God finally speaks to him, even if what He first said might not have been what Job wanted to hear.

What was the first question that God asked Job, and what was implied in that question? *Job 38:2.*

All through the Bible we find God asking humans questions. This is not because He doesn't know the answers already. Instead, as a good teacher often does, God asks questions because they are an effective way to get us to think about our situation, to make us confront ourselves, to help us work through issues and come to the proper conclusions. The questions, then, that God asks are not to teach the Lord something that He didn't already understand. Rather, they are often asked in order to help people learn things that perhaps they needed to understand better. God's questions are a rhetorical device to help reach people with truth.

Read the following questions from God. What do you think God's purpose was in asking those questions? What point was He making?

Gen. 3:11 _____

Gen. 4:9 _____

1 Kings 19:9 _____

Acts 9:4 _____

Matt. 16:13 _____

Job had a lot to say about God, and the Lord obviously wanted him to see that, in fact, there was a lot he didn't know or understand about his Creator. In many ways, God's opening question to Job parallels some of the words that these men had said to him as well (*see Job 8:1, 2; 11:1-3; 15:1-3*).

If God were to ask you a question about the state of your life right now, what do you think He would ask, and what would you answer? What do the question and the answer teach you about yourself?

The Lord as Creator

Read Job 38:4–41. What questions does God ask Job, and what is the purpose of those questions?

If Job expected some detailed explanation about why all these calamities happened to him, he didn't get it. Instead, what he got was a flow of rhetorical questions contrasting the Lord in His creative might to the transience and ignorance of poor Job.

“‘Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?’” the Lord begins (*Job 38:4, NKJV*). After echoing some of the earliest images in Genesis—for example, the origins of the earth, the sea, light, and darkness—God says to Job (basically) that, of course you know all these things “because you were born then, or because the number of your days is great” (*see Job 38:21, NKJV*).

The Lord then points to wonders and mysteries of Creation, again with a series of rhetorical questions that cover not just the foundations of the earth but also the mysteries of the weather and even of the stars themselves. “‘Can you bind the cluster of the Pleiades, or loose the belt of Orion?’” (*Job 38:31, NKJV*). He then points Job back to the earth, to everything from human insight (*Job 38:36*) to the lives of wild animals (*Job 38:39–41*)—a theme that is fleshed out in much more detail all through Job 39, as well. Had the book been written today, the Lord might have asked, “Who binds the quarks in protons and neutrons?” “Where were you when I first measured out a Planck mass?” “Is it by your wisdom that gravity bends space and time?”

The answer to all these questions is the same: *of course not*. Job wasn't there for any of those events, and he had little knowledge about any of the phenomena the Lord referred to. God's point was to show Job that even with all his wisdom and knowledge and even though he spoke “right” (*Job 42:7*) about God in contrast to these other men, Job still knew so little. And his lack of knowledge was best revealed by how great Job's ignorance of the created world was.

If Job knew so little about the creation, how much could he understand about the Creator? What a powerful contrast between the Creator and the created, between God and humanity. Though God contrasted Himself to Job, any other human being (with the exception of Jesus) would have sufficed as well. What are we in contrast to God? And yet, look at what this God has done to save us and to offer us the hope of eternal fellowship with Him.

The Wisdom of the Wise

From our perspective today, it's easy to look at the questions that God had asked Job and realize how little a man like Job, living thousands of years ago, could understand about the created world. It wasn't until the A.D. 1500s, for instance, that humans (at least some of them) finally understood that the motion of the sun in the sky was the result of the rotation of the earth on its axis, and the reverse of the commonly held belief that the sun orbits around the earth—a truth that most of us take for granted now.

Thanks mostly to modern science, we live today with knowledge of the natural world that people in Bible times couldn't begin to comprehend. And yet, even with all this acquired knowledge, we humans are still limited in our understanding of the natural world and its origins.

Read over the questions God asked Job in chapters 38 and 39. How much better could people answer them today?

There is no question that science has revealed to us facets of reality that were previously hidden. However, so much still remains for us to learn. In many ways, far from removing the majesty and the mystery of God's creation, science has made it even more fascinating, revealing a depth and complexity of the natural world that previous generations knew nothing about.

“The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children forever.” Deuteronomy 29:29. Just how God accomplished the work of creation He has never revealed to men; human science cannot search out the secrets of the Most High. His creative power is as incomprehensible as His existence.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 113.

What warning, however, should we take from the following texts in regard to the great limits of human knowledge? *1 Cor. 3:19, 1 Cor. 1:18–27.*

Even with all the knowledge humans have accumulated in the past few hundred years, the Creation remains full of wonders and mysteries that we can barely fathom. The more we learn about the created world, the more amazing and mysterious it appears to us. In what ways does the created world cause you to marvel before the power of our God?

Repenting in Dust and Ashes

Read Job 40:1–4 and Job 42:1–6. What was Job’s response to God’s revelation of Himself?

Obviously Job was overwhelmed by what God had shown him. In fact, in Job 42:3, when he says, “ ‘ “Who is this who hides counsel without knowledge?” ’ ” (*NKJV*), he was simply repeating God’s first question to him. Job knew the answer now: it was Job himself who spoke about what he really didn’t know.

Notice, too, what Job said in Job 42:5. Though he had only heard about God, now that he saw God—that is, now that he got a better view of God—he saw himself for what he really was. That’s why he reacted as he did, abhorring himself and repenting in dust and ashes.

Read Isaiah 6:1–5 and Luke 5:1–8. How do the reactions described there parallel that of Job?

What we see in all these cases are manifestations of a key Bible truth, and that is the sinfulness of humanity. Job was “blameless and upright, and one who feared God and shunned evil” (*Job 1:1, NKJV*). And despite Satan’s best attempts to turn him against God, Job stayed faithful through it all. We are dealing here with a solid, faithful believer in the Lord.

And yet—what? As with Isaiah and Peter, a glimpse of the holiness and power of God was enough to make Job cringe with a sense of his own sinfulness and smallness. That’s because we are all fallen, sin-damaged beings whose very nature itself brings us into conflict with God. That’s why, in the end, no one can save himself; no one can do enough good works to merit any favor before God. That’s why we all—even the “best” among us, those who, like Job, are upright and blameless and who fear God and shun evil—need grace, need a Savior, need Someone to do for us what we can never do for ourselves. Fortunately we have all that, and more, in Jesus.

Imagine yourself, right now, standing face to face before God. What do you think your reaction would be?

Further Thought: “God has permitted a flood of light to be poured upon the world in both science and art; but when professedly scientific men treat upon these subjects from a merely human point of view, they will assuredly come to wrong conclusions. It may be innocent to speculate beyond what God’s word has revealed, if our theories do not contradict facts found in the Scriptures; but those who leave the word of God, and seek to account for His created works upon scientific principles, are drifting without chart or compass upon an unknown ocean. The greatest minds, if not guided by the word of God in their research, become bewildered in their attempts to trace the relations of science and revelation. Because the Creator and His works are so far beyond their comprehension that they are unable to explain them by natural laws, they regard Bible history as unreliable. Those who doubt the reliability of the records of the Old and New Testaments, will be led to go a step further, and doubt the existence of God; and then, having lost their anchor, they are left to beat about upon the rocks of infidelity.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 113.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Look at the Ellen G. White statement in Friday’s study. What evidence do we see that what she warned about is actually happening, especially in the area of science? What are some things that science, at least as now practiced, teaches that are in blatant contradiction to God’s Word?
- 2 Alfred North Whitehead, an influential mathematician and author who lived in the previous century, said the following: “Fifty-seven years ago it was when I was a young man in the University of Cambridge. I was taught science and mathematics by brilliant men and I did well in them; since the turn of the century I have lived to see every one of the basic assumptions of both set aside. . . . And yet, in the face of that, the discoverers of the new hypotheses in science are declaring, ‘Now at last, we have certitude.’ ”—A. N. Whitehead, *Dialogues of Alfred North Whitehead*. What should this tell us about how careful we need to be in accepting what the world’s “great men” teach us, especially when what they teach blatantly contradicts God’s Word?
- 3 What are some of the marvels of Creation that modern science has revealed to us that people in the time of Job (or even just two hundred years ago) couldn’t possibly have understood? How do these things reveal to us even more the amazing creative power of our Lord?

Doing God's Business: Part 2

I met with church leaders in the project's region, and we laid plans to train and equip 1,000 laypersons to share the gospel in their homeland. Although evangelism in this country is technically illegal, God opened doors.

When we arrived, we thought that some of the 1,000 people who had signed up wouldn't come. But 1,300 people came! Some knew that they wouldn't receive the materials, but they wanted to come and learn anyway. What an amazing bunch of laypersons we have there!

We couldn't import evangelistic materials or DVD players for the lay evangelists, so we had to buy or produce these items within the country. Each person is allowed to buy only one DVD player, and we had to be sure that they didn't all go out to buy the DVD players at the same time or in the same place. We bought paper and printing materials on the black market to print the scripts that go with the DVDs we gave to the volunteers. All of this had to be done secretly, and we can't talk about how God made it happen—but He did!

We trained and equipped the lay members and sent them back home to start working. One hundred of these lay members are now working full-time, like Global Mission pioneers, to teach and baptize and establish new church plants. They have been secretly moved to areas within the country where we have no churches. There they teach their new neighbors about God's love and plant new churches.

In the first six months of the program, the believers in this country have studied with thousands of eager people. More than 650 people have been baptized, and six new churches have been planted. And these dear people are just getting started!

I'm amazed at what God is doing through my family and me and others who are dedicated to serving God however He leads. We are God's hands, stewards of His resources. He's using us to further His work in a place I never could have dreamed possible.

Every believer is a steward of God's resources, and He will bless each of us as we turn our lives and resources over to Him.

This testimony is from a Seventh-day Adventist businessman in Portugal.

Job's Redeemer



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Job 19:25–27; John 1:1–14; Job 10:4, 5; Luke 2:11; Gal. 4:19; Luke 9:22; Isa. 53:1–6.*

Memory Text: “Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted” (*Isaiah 53:4, NKJV*).

With the sudden appearance of the Lord Himself, beginning in chapter 38, the book of Job reached its climax. God revealed Himself to Job in a powerful and miraculous way, and this resulted in Job's confession and contrition. The Lord then rebuked Job's three friends for their wrong words, and Job prayed for them. “And the LORD restored Job's losses when he prayed for his friends. Indeed the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before” (*Job 42:10, NKJV*), and Job lived a long and full life afterward.

There is, however, something unsettling, something unsatisfactory about the story and how it ends. God and Satan, arguing in heaven, battle it out here on earth in the life and flesh of poor Job? It just doesn't seem fair, doesn't seem right, that Job would have to bear the terrible brunt of this conflict between God and Satan, while the Lord remained in heaven and simply watched it.

There must be more to the story. And there is. It is revealed many centuries later, in Jesus and His death on the cross. In Jesus alone we find amazing and comforting answers to the questions that the book of Job doesn't fully answer.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 17.

My Redeemer Liveth

When God appeared to Job in chapter 38, He revealed Himself to Job as the Creator, who “ ‘divided a channel for the overflowing water,’ ” the One who made “ ‘a path for the thunderbolt, to cause it to rain on a land where there is no one’ ” (*Job 38:25, 26, NKJV*). Our Lord, though, isn’t only the Creator. He has another crucial title and role as well.

Read Job 19:25–27. What do these words reveal about Job’s hope of salvation?

With these famous verses, Job shows that he had some knowledge of the Redeemer, some knowledge that, though people died, there was hope beyond the grave, and this hope was found in the Redeemer, who was to come to the earth one day.

These words of Job point to what is the most crucial and important truth in the Bible: God as our Redeemer. Yes, God is our Creator. But in a fallen world, in a world of sinners doomed to die eternally in their sins, we need more than a Creator. We need a Redeemer as well. And that’s precisely who our God is: both our Creator and our Redeemer (*see Isa. 48:13–17*), and it’s from Him in both those roles that we have the great hope of eternal life.

Read John 1:1–14. In this passage, how does John tie together Jesus as Creator with Jesus as our Redeemer?

The allusion to Genesis 1:1, God as Creator, is obvious in John 1:1. And if that weren’t enough, these words—“He was in the world, and the world was made through Him. . . . But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name” (*John 1:10–12, NKJV*)—make the link between Jesus as Creator and Redeemer inseparable. Indeed, it’s only because He is the Creator that He can be our Redeemer, as well.

If we had only a Creator but no Redeemer, what hope would we have? What does your answer say about why Jesus as Redeemer is so important to us?

The Son of Man

In the earliest chapters of Job, we were given a glimpse into the reality of the great controversy between Christ and Satan. As we know, it was a battle that started in heaven but eventually came to the earth (*see Rev. 12:7–12*). In the book of Job we saw that same dynamic: a conflict in heaven that comes to earth. Unfortunately for Job, that particular conflict on earth centered on him.

Read Job 10:4, 5. What was Job’s complaint, and did he not have a point?

Job’s point was simple. You are God, the Sovereign of the universe, the Creator. How can you know what it is like to be a human, to suffer the things that we suffer?

How do the following texts answer Job’s complaint? *Luke 2:11, John 1:14, Luke 19:10, Matt. 4:2, 1 Tim. 2:5, Heb. 4:15.*

Job’s complaint, that God wasn’t a human and therefore couldn’t know human woe, was answered fully and completely by the coming of Jesus into humanity. Though never losing His divinity, Jesus also was fully human, and in that humanity He knew what it was like to suffer and struggle, just as Job and all humans do. In fact, all through the Gospels, we see the reality of Christ’s humanity and the sufferings that He went through in our humanity. Jesus answered Job’s complaint.

“It was not a make-believe humanity that Christ took upon Himself. He took human nature and lived human nature. . . . He was not only made flesh, but He was made in the likeness of sinful flesh.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 1124.

Think what it means that Jesus took humanity. What should this tell you about how closely He can relate to you in any of the struggles that you are facing right now?

The Death of Christ

What do the following texts tell us about Jesus and how we are to view Him?

1 John 2:6 _____

Gal. 4:19 _____

Without question, Jesus is the model man. His life—His character—is the example that all who follow Him should seek by God’s grace to emulate. Jesus is the *only* perfect example we have in terms of how to live the kind of life to which God calls us.

Still, Jesus didn’t come to this earth merely to give us an example. Our situation as sinners called for more than just character development, as if reforming our characters and molding us into His image is all that His work as Redeemer required. We need more than that; we need a Substitute, Someone to pay the penalty for our sins. He came not just to live a perfect life as an example to us all; He came also to die the death that we deserve so that His perfect life can be credited to us as our own.

What do the following texts teach about the necessity of Christ’s death for us? *Mark 8:31, Luke 9:22, Luke 24:7, Gal. 2:21.*

Jesus had to die for us because obedience to the law, though central to the Christian life, is not what saves the fallen. “Is the law then against the promises of God? Certainly not! For if there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law” (*Gal. 3:21, NKJV*). If any law could save a sinner, it would be God’s, but even that law can’t save us. Only the perfect life of our perfect Example, Jesus, could save us, and so Christ came to offer Himself as “one sacrifice for sins forever” (*Heb. 10:12, NKJV*).

How does your own record of law-keeping show your need of a Substitute?

The Sufferings of the Son of Man

Read Isaiah 53:1–6. What does this tell us about the sufferings of the Lord on the cross?

Isaiah 53:4 said that Jesus bore our griefs and sorrows. That must include Job's griefs and sorrows as well. And not just Job's but the whole world's. It was for the sin of all humans who ever lived that Jesus died on the cross.

So, only at the cross can the book of Job be put into proper perspective. Here we have the same God who revealed Himself to Job—the God who teaches the eagle to fly, the God who binds the quarks—suffering more than any human being, even Job, ever suffered or could suffer. The griefs and sorrows that we know individually, He assumed corporately; no one, then, can lecture God on suffering, not when He in humanity bore in Himself the full brunt of all the suffering that sin has spread around the globe. We know only our own griefs, only our own sorrows; at the cross, Jesus experienced them all.

The God who asked Job, “ ‘Do you know the ordinances of the heavens? Can you set their dominion over the earth?’ ” (*Job 38:33, NKJV*) becomes more incredible when we realize that though He created the “ ‘ordinances of heaven,’ ” He also took upon Himself earthly flesh and in that flesh died so that He “might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil” (*Heb. 2:14, NKJV*).

Viewed through the Cross, the book of Job makes more sense than it does without it, because the Cross answers many questions that the book leaves unanswered. And the biggest question of all deals with how fair it is for God to be up in heaven while Job on earth is forced to suffer as he does, all in order to help refute Satan's charges. The Cross shows that no matter how badly Job or any human being suffers in this world, our Lord voluntarily suffered so much worse than any of us could, all in order to give us the hope and promise of salvation.

Job saw God as Creator; after the cross, we see Him as Creator and Redeemer, or particularly, the Creator who became our Redeemer (*Phil. 2:6–8*). And to do that, He had to suffer from sin in ways that no human being, Job included, would or could ever suffer. Thus, like Job, only more so, what can we do before such a sight but exclaim: “I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes” (*Job 42:6, NKJV*)?

Satan Unmasked

Read John 12:30–32. What is Jesus saying about Satan in the context of the Cross and the great controversy?

After talking about the death of Jesus on the cross, Ellen G. White wrote about the powerful impact it had in heaven and for the onlooking universe. “Satan’s lying charges against the divine character and government appeared in their true light. He had accused God of seeking merely the exaltation of Himself in requiring submission and obedience from His creatures, and had declared that, while the Creator exacted self-denial from all others, He Himself practiced no self-denial and made no sacrifice. Now it was seen that for the salvation of a fallen and sinful race, the Ruler of the universe had made the greatest sacrifice which love could make; for ‘God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself.’ 2 Corinthians 5:19. It was seen, also, that while Lucifer had opened the door for the entrance of sin by his desire for honor and supremacy, Christ had, in order to destroy sin, humbled Himself and become obedient unto death.”—*The Great Controversy*, p. 502.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:19. How did Christ’s death reconcile the fallen world to God?

The world had fallen into sin, into rebellion; it had left itself open to the schemes of Satan as so clearly seen, for example, in the book of Job. Jesus, though, by His taking hold of humanity in Himself while never losing His divinity, formed an unbreakable bond between heaven and earth and, with His death, guaranteed the final demise of sin and Satan. At the cross, Jesus paid the legal penalty for sin, thus reconciling the fallen world to God. Though we are sinners condemned to death, by faith we can have the promise of eternal life in Jesus.

Whatever sins you have committed, Jesus paid the full penalty for them at the cross. Why should this amazing truth change your life and cause you to want to live in obedience to Him?

Further Thought: “ ‘Now is the judgment of this world,’ Christ continued; ‘now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all unto Me. This He said, signifying what death He should die.’ This is the crisis of the world. If I become the propitiation for the sins of men, the world will be lighted up. Satan’s hold upon the souls of men will be broken. The defaced image of God will be restored in humanity, and a family of believing saints will finally inherit the heavenly home. This is the result of Christ’s death. The Saviour is lost in contemplation of the scene of triumph called up before Him. He sees the cross, the cruel, ignominious cross, with all its attending horrors, blazing with glory.

“But the work of human redemption is not all that is accomplished by the cross. The love of God is manifested to the universe. The prince of this world is cast out. The accusations which Satan has brought against God are refuted. The reproach which he has cast upon heaven is forever removed. Angels as well as men are drawn to the Redeemer.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 625, 626.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 What are other ways that you can think of regarding how the life and death of Jesus answered questions that the book of Job left unanswered?
- 2 Think over what the Cross reveals to us about the character of God, especially when we realize that the One who created us was the One who died for us on the cross. Why should this reality give us so much hope and comfort, regardless of whatever trials we are facing? How can this amazing truth teach us to trust in God and in His goodness? (*See Rom. 8:32.*)
- 3 As we saw, the book of Job showed, among other things, that the great controversy is a cosmic issue and that the conflict between Christ and Satan has a dimension that goes beyond the earth itself. Imagine what it must have been like for heavenly creatures, who knew Jesus only in His heavenly glory, to see Him go through what He did on the cross. How can dwelling on this amazing idea help us to come to a great appreciation of what we have been given in Jesus?

Waking Up My Heart: Part 1

I grew up in a caring, intellectually stimulating home. My parents treated my brother and me with respect. We were never hungry and always had what we needed. But religion wasn't part of our home. I never considered that anything or anyone might actually exist somewhere beyond my tangible world. I never dreamed God could speak to me.

My parents quarreled a lot, and when I was 10 years old, they divorced. Father had a top-secret job in the army, and Mother was a clerk at the town hall. After the divorce, my brother and I lived with our mother. There I finished high school and planned for my future.

One day, I met a former schoolmate on the street in our town. We weren't close friends, but we shared a similar philosophy of life. I was surprised when he started talking about religion. Right there in the street, Kveto began telling me about Jesus Christ, about God's love for me, and about the Bible and prophecy. He spoke enthusiastically, and I became embarrassed as passersby stared at us. Soon, I had heard enough. I excused myself and walked on, wondering what had changed Kveto so radically.

I met Kveto on the street several times soon after that. Each time we met, he turned the topic of our conversation to religion. He spoke, I listened, and from time to time I tried to outwit him with a question I didn't think he could answer. But my lack of religious training and knowledge of the Bible was no match for Kveto's newfound Christian zeal.

Each time we met, Kveto invited me to his house to study prophecy. Finally, I agreed to go. While Kveto wanted to prove that God exists, I was more interested in proving that He didn't. I told him I thought the Bible could have been written by anybody and that it certainly wasn't true. I wanted to set Kveto straight.

Kveto always prayed before we opened the Bible, and later he admitted that he prayed after I left his house. As we began studying the prophecies, I felt a growing curiosity about what the Bible had to say about the future. We studied the books of Daniel and Revelation and some writings of Ellen G. White.

Then something strange happened. I came home from a Bible study and began to pray—by myself, alone, for the first time in my life. I didn't have anything special to say in my prayer; I simply found myself reaching out to make contact with the Power of the universe.

To be continued in next week's Inside Story.

The Character of Job



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Job 1:1, 8; Job 29:8–17; Job 31:1–23; Exod. 20:17; Matt. 7:22–27; Matt. 5:16; Eph. 3:10.*

Memory Text: “Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect?” (*James 2:22, NKJV*).

In the midst of all the major issues touched on in the book of Job, we mustn't lose sight of another crucial theme: that of Job himself. Who was this man whom the Lord trusted so much that He challenged the devil over his faithfulness and integrity? Who was this man who did not understand why all this was happening to him, who knew that what was happening to him wasn't fair, who expressed anger and frustration over it all, and yet stayed faithful right through to the end?

While the essence of the book of Job dealt with Job after the calamities struck, from this story we can pick up information about Job's earlier life. And what we learn about Job's past and the kind of man he was gives us a greater understanding of why Job stayed faithful to the Lord, even amid all the terrible suffering, even amid everything Satan did to try to turn him away from God.

What was Job like, and what can we learn about how he lived that can help to make us be more faithful followers of the Lord as we live our own lives?

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 24.

The Man From Uz

Read Job 1:1 and Job 1:8. What does this tell us about the character of Job?

Though Job had been told all through the dialogues that he must have done something wrong in order for all this evil to come upon him, the opposite appears to be the case. It was his goodness, his faithfulness, that made him the special target of Satan.

How good and how faithful was he? First, the text tells us that he was “perfect.” This word does not have to mean “sinless,” as was Jesus. It comes, instead, with the idea of completeness, integrity, sincerity, but in a relative sense. The person who is “perfect” in the sight of God is the person who has reached the degree of development that Heaven expects of him or her at any given time. The Hebrew word for “perfect,” *tam*, “is equivalent to the Greek word *teleios*, which is often translated ‘perfect’ in the [New Testament] but which is better translated ‘full grown’ or ‘mature.’ ”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p. 499. Job’s later experiences revealed that he had not reached the ultimate perfection of character. Though faithful and upright, he was still growing.

Second, the text says he was “upright.” The word means “straight,” “level,” “just,” “right.” Job lived in a way that he could be called “a good citizen.”

Third, the text says he “feared God.” Though the Old Testament portrays the idea of “fearing” God as part of what being a faithful Israelite was all about, the phrase also was used in the New Testament for Gentiles who faithfully served the God of Israel (*see Acts 10:2, 22*).

Finally, Job “eschewed,” or shunned, evil. This characterization of Job was affirmed by the Lord Himself, when He said to Satan, “Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil?” (*Job 1:8*).

In the end, Job was a man of God whose faith was revealed by the kind of life he lived; and thus, he truly bore witness “to angels, and to men” (*1 Cor. 4:9*) about what a person can be in Christ.

If the book of Job were about you, how would the opening line read?
 “There was a _____ in the land of _____ who was
 _____ and _____ and who _____
 God and _____ evil.”

Steps Bathed in Cream

As Job struggled to come to terms with the calamity that befell him, he did think about his past life and how good it had been for him and how he had lived. Talking about the earlier days, Job said that in this time “my steps were bathed with cream” (*Job 29:6, NKJV*).

For instance, in *Job 29:2*, Job talked about the time that “‘God [has] watched over me’” (*NKJV*). The Hebrew word for “watched over” comes from a common word used all through the Old Testament to talk about God’s watchcare for His people (*see Ps. 91:11, Num. 6:24*). Beyond question, Job had the good life. The important thing, too, was that he knew that he had the good life.

Read *Job 29:8–17*. What do these verses tell us about how others had viewed Job and how he treated those who were struggling?

We can see here just how much Job was respected. The phrase about his taking his “‘seat in the open square’” (*Job 29:7, NKJV*) brings in the idea of some sort of local governance, of which Job was obviously a part. Such seats would usually be given to the senior and respected members of the society, and among them Job was highly esteemed.

But we can see that even the “lowest” members of the society loved and respected him. The poor, the perishing, the blind, the widow, the fatherless, and the lame—those who had not been blessed as Job had been blessed were the very ones to whom he gave aid and comfort.

“God has given in His word a picture of a prosperous man—one whose life was in the truest sense a success, a man whom both heaven and earth delighted to honor.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 142.

Verses like these and others (as we will see) show us why Job had been a very successful person in every way, both in the sight of men and of God.

It’s easy to be kind and respectful to the rich and the powerful and the famous. How, though, do you treat those who have nothing to offer you at all?

Heart and Eyes

At first glance, it could sound as if Job were bragging, as if Job were parading his holiness and virtue and good conduct before others. This attitude, of course, is precisely the kind that the Bible condemns (*see Matthew 23*). But that's not what was happening here with Job. Again, it is crucial to remember the context: he's being told that his past life, a life assumed to have been pretty evil, is the cause of his suffering. Job, meanwhile, knows that this simply cannot be true and that nothing he had done made him deserve what had come upon him. So he spends this time recounting the kind of life he lived and the kind of person he was.

Read Job 31:1–23. What else does Job say about how he lived before the calamities?

Notice, too, that Job wasn't dealing only with his outward actions. The text “ ‘my heart followed my eyes’ ” (*Job 31:7, NASB*) shows that Job understood the deeper meaning of holiness, the deeper meaning of right and wrong and of God's law. Job apparently knew that God cares about the heart, about our thoughts, as well as our actions (*see 1 Sam. 16:7, Exod. 20:17, Matt. 5:28*). Job knew that it was wrong to lust after a woman and not just to commit adultery with her. (Again, what powerful evidence for the fact that knowledge of the true God had existed even before the Lord called the nation of Israel to be His covenant people and a witness of Him.)

Read what Job said in Job 31:13–15. Why is this message so crucial?

Here Job shows an amazing understanding, especially for his time (any time, really) about the basic equality of all human beings. The ancient world was not a place where concepts of universal rights and universal laws were understood or followed. People groups thought of themselves as greater than and superior to others, and at times thought nothing of denying basic dignity and rights to others. Here, though, Job shows just how much he understands about human rights and that these rights originate in the God who made us. In some ways, Job was ahead of not only his time but ours as well.

A House on the Rock

Read Job 31:24–34. What else can we learn about Job?

No wonder the Lord said what He did about the life and character of Job. This is a man who clearly lived out his faith, a man whose works revealed the reality of his relationship with God. This, of course, made his complaint all the more bitter: *Why is this happening to me?* And, of course, it made the arguments of his friends as vain and hollow as they were.

But there's a deeper and more important message that we can take from the reality of Job's faithful and obedient life. Notice how closely the life he lived in the past was tied to how he responded to the tragedies that befell him later. It was not by chance or luck or sheer willpower that Job refused to "curse God, and die" (*Job 2:9*). No, it was because all those years of faithfulness and obedience to God gave him the faith and character that enabled him to trust in the Lord, regardless of what happened to him.

Read Matthew 7:22–27. What is found in these verses that reveals the reason Job stayed faithful?

The key to Job's major victory here was found in all the "smaller" victories he had before (*see also Luke 16:10*). It was his faithful adherence to right, without being willing to compromise, that made Job what he was. What we see in Job is an example of what the book of James says about the role of works in a life of faith: "Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect?" (*James 2:22, NKJV*). What an important principle of the Christian life is revealed in this text. In the story of Job we see this principle played out in a powerful way. Job was made of the same flesh and bone as all of us; yet, through the grace of God and his own diligent effort, he lived a life of faithful obedience to God.

What choices do you need to make in order to live as faithfully as did Job?

The Manifold Wisdom of God

Earlier in the book of Job, amid the back and forth between the characters, Eliphaz the Temanite said to Job: “‘Is it any pleasure to the Almighty that you are righteous? Or is it gain to Him that you make your ways blameless?’” (*Job 22:3, NKJV*). That’s a very ironic question, given what we know about what was happening behind the scenes in heaven. Yes, it is a pleasure to God if Job was righteous, and it was gain to Him if Job made his way blameless. And this is true not just with Job—the same goes for all of those who claim to be followers of the Lord.

Read Matthew 5:16. How do those words help to answer the question that Eliphaz threw at Job?

The immediate issue in the book of Job was, would Job be faithful? Satan said he wouldn’t; God said he would. Job’s faithfulness then was definitely to God’s advantage, at least in this specific battle with Satan.

This story, though, is just a microcosm of bigger issues. The first angel’s message tells us, in part, to “give glory” to God (*Rev. 14:7*), and Jesus explained in Matthew 5:16 that by our good works we can bring glory to God. This is what Job did; this is what we can do too.

Read Ephesians 3:10. How was the principle expressed here revealed in the book of Job, but on a smaller scale?

What we see in this text, and in the book of Job, are expressions of the fact that God is working in the lives of His followers to change them, for His glory, into His own image. “The very image of God is to be reproduced in humanity. The honor of God, the honor of Christ, is involved in the perfection of the character of His people.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 671. The life of Job was an example of how human beings may reveal this principle, even though Job lived many thousands of years ago. God’s people in every age have the privilege of living their lives in the same way, as well.

What in your life brings glory to God? What does your answer tell you about yourself and how you live and what you might need to change?

Further Thought: The Protestant Reformation reclaimed the great truth of salvation by faith alone. This truth was first intimated in the Word back in Eden itself (*see Gen. 3:15*) and then given fuller expression in the life of Abraham (*see Gen. 15:6, Rom. 4:3*), before being successively revealed in Scripture up through Paul. Yet the truth of salvation by faith alone always included the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer, not as the means of salvation but as the expression of it. In the life and character of Job, we find a great example of what this work looks like. Theologians sometimes call this work “sanctification,” which means basically “holiness.” It is so significant in Scripture that we are told to strive “for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord” (*Heb. 12:14, ESV*). The basic meaning of *sanctification* is “set apart for holy use,” an idea seen, for example, when the Lord said to His covenant people, “ ‘ “You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy” ’ ” (*Lev. 19:2, NKJV*). Though the word and concept appear in various ways in both the Old and New Testament, they deal with what God does in us. It can be seen as a moral growth in goodness and toward goodness. It is “a progressive process of moral change by the power of the Holy Spirit in cooperation with the human will.”—*Handbook of SDA Theology*, p. 296. Though this work is something that only God can accomplish in us, we are not forced into sanctification any more than we are forced into justification. We give ourselves to the Lord, and the same Lord who justifies us by faith will sanctify us as well, molding us, as He did with Job, into the image of God, at least to whatever degree is possible this side of eternity. So, Paul writes, “My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you” (*Gal. 4:19, NKJV*), and Ellen G. White writes: “Christ is our pattern, the perfect and holy example that has been given us to follow. We can never equal the Pattern, but we may imitate and resemble it according to our ability.”—*That I May Know Him*, p. 265.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 What choices can we make that will influence the degree to which the Lord can work in us? We know that only God can change the heart, but we must cooperate. What does that cooperation look like? How is it manifested?
- 2 Colossians 2:6 reads: “As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him” (*NKJV*). How do these words help us to understand what it means to live in faith and obedience?
- 3 How can we as a church, not just as individuals, bring glory to the Lord before humans and before angels?

Waking Up My Heart: Part 2

About six months after my first visit to Kveto's home, he invited me to attend church with him. I'd been reading the Bible and was interested in what kind of church would teach these things, so I decided to go. I was interested but careful, for I didn't want to be seduced into something irrational.

The church building was unimpressive, but when we entered, everyone wanted to shake my hand. Kveto knew I was a reserved person, so he had warned me that the people were friendly. I felt a different atmosphere in this place, one filled with peace, order, and love.

I really enjoyed the church service and the warmth of the people, and began going to church every Sabbath. Now I know that the Holy Spirit was awakening my heart and mind so I could understand the truth. I recognized my own spiritual poverty. God gave me faith and changed my heart.

My family noticed the changes in my life. They questioned me, fearing that I was being deceived by some sect. They saw that my religious conviction was strong and never forbade me to visit the church or read the Bible.

As Kveto and I studied together, we dealt with other aspects of faith in God and doctrines. I regularly attended public meetings on the topics found in the books of Daniel and Revelation. Repetition helped me to understand those things and answered questions that I wasn't sure how to ask.

One year after I first met Kveto on the street, I committed my life to God. On a Friday night, under the canopy of heaven, I was baptized. I felt as though heaven was near as I answered the pastor's questions and affirmed my faith. On Sabbath, I was officially received by the church. I was 20 years old.

How patient and caring is our mighty God! It amazes me to know that He who controls the whole universe would stoop down to free me from the errors of this world! He saved me, and He leads me daily toward a greater understanding of salvation! He caught me when I was trying to decide what I would do with my life. After my baptism, I studied at the Seventh-day Adventist theological seminary in Prague so that I could be an instrument in God's hand to lead other searching souls to Him.

I praise God and thank Him for Kveto, who never gave up on me when I did not believe.

JOZEF PLACHY is now an ordained Seventh-day Adventist minister and serves as the director of Children's Ministries, Children's Sabbath School, and Pathfinders in the Slovakian Conference.

Some Lessons From Job



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: 2 Cor. 5:7, Job 1–2:8, Matt. 4:10, Matt. 13:39, John 8:1–11, Heb. 11:10, Heb. 4:15.

Memory Text: “Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord—that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful” (James 5:11, NKJV).

We’ve come to the end of this quarter’s study on Job. Though we might have covered much in the book, we must admit that there’s still much more to cover, much more to learn. Of course, even in the secular world, everything we learn and discover simply leads to more things to learn and to discover. And if it’s like that with atoms, stars, jellyfish, and math equations, how much more so with the Word of God?

“We have no reason to doubt God’s word because we cannot understand the mysteries of His providence. In the natural world we are constantly surrounded with wonders beyond our comprehension. Should we then be surprised to find in the spiritual world also mysteries that we cannot fathom? The difficulty lies solely in the weakness and narrowness of the human mind.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 170.

Yes, mysteries remain, especially in a book like Job, where many of life’s most difficult questions are raised. Nevertheless, we will look at some lessons we can take away from this story that can help us, like Job, to be faithful to the Lord amid a world of troubles.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 31.

By Faith and Not by Sight

Read 2 Corinthians 5:7 and 2 Corinthians 4:18. What crucial truths are revealed in these texts? How can these truths help us as we seek to be faithful followers of the Lord?

The immediate context of 2 Corinthians 4:18 is eschatological, talking about the end times, when we are clothed in immortality, a great promise that we don't yet see fulfilled. That's a promise we have to take by faith and not by sight, because it hasn't come to pass yet.

Likewise, the book of Job shows us that there's so much more to reality than what we can see. This should not, though, be so difficult a concept for people living in our day and age to grasp, not when science has revealed the existence of unseen forces all around us.

A preacher stood before a church in a large city. He asked the congregation to be quiet. For a few seconds there was no sound. He then pulled out a radio and turned it on, running the dial across the channels. All sorts of sounds came out of the radio.

"Let me ask," the preacher said. "Where did these sounds come from? Did they originate in the radio itself? No, these sounds were in the air all around us, as radio waves, waves just as real as my voice is now. But the way we are wired, we don't have access to them. But the fact that we can't see or feel or hear them doesn't mean that they don't exist, right?"

What other real things that we can't see (such as radiation or gravity) exist around us? What spiritual lessons can we draw from the fact that these unseen forces not only exist but can impact our lives?

As the book of Job showed, none of the people involved really grasped what was going on. They believed in God and even had some understanding about God and His character and creative power. But outside the bare facts of reality that they could see—that is, Job's calamity—they didn't have a clue as to what was happening behind the scenes. In the same way, might we not at times be as clueless as to the unseen realities around us? The book of Job, then, teaches us that we need to learn to live by faith, realizing our weakness and just how little we really see and know.

Evil Being

One of the great questions that has challenged human thinking deals with evil. Though some philosophers and even religionists have denied the existence of evil or think we should at least abandon the term, most people would disagree. Evil is real; it's a part of this world. Though we can argue over what is or is not evil, most of us (to paraphrase a U.S. Supreme Court justice in another context) "know it when we see it."

Evil is sometimes put into two broad classes: natural and moral. Natural evil is defined as the kind that arises from natural disasters, such as when earthquakes or floods or pestilences bring suffering. Moral evil results from deliberate actions of other human beings, such as murder or robbery.

All sorts of theories, ancient and modern, attempt to account for the existence of evil. As Seventh-day Adventists, we believe that the Bible teaches that evil originated in the fall of a created being, Satan. The popular culture, aided by materialistic philosophical speculations, has denied the idea of Satan. But one can do so only by rejecting the clear testimony of Scripture, which depicts Satan as a real being out to do humans as much harm as possible.

This is a truth especially revealed in the book of Job.

Read Job 1:1 to Job 2:8. How do these two chapters help us to understand the role of Satan in the evil that's so prevalent in the world?

In Job's case, Satan was directly responsible for the evil, both moral and natural, that fell upon this man. But what we see in the book of Job doesn't necessarily mean that every example of evil or suffering is directly related to demonic activity. The fact is, as with the characters in the book of Job, we just don't know all the reasons for the terrible things that happen. In fact, the name of "Satan" never even came up in the dialogues regarding Job's misfortunes. The speakers blamed God, they blamed Job, but never Satan himself. Nevertheless, the book of Job should show us who is responsible in the end for the evil on the earth.

What do the following texts tell us about the reality of Satan? Rev. 12:12; Matt. 4:10; Matt. 13:39; Luke 8:12; Luke 13:16; Luke 22:3, 31; Acts 5:3; 1 Pet. 5:8. More important, what examples do you have of Satan's influence in your life? How can you be protected against him?

With Friends Like These . . .

All through the book of Job, the three (and then four) men who came to speak to Job did so with good motives. They had heard what had happened to him, and they came “to mourn with him and to comfort him” (*Job 2:11*). However, after Job first started speaking, bemoaning the tragedies that befell him, they apparently felt it was more important for them to put Job in his place and set his theology straight than it was to encourage and uplift the spirits of their suffering friend.

Time after time, they got it all wrong. But suppose they had gotten it all right? Suppose all these things came upon Job because he had deserved them? They might have been theologically correct, but so what? Did Job need correct theology? Or did he need something else entirely?

Read John 8:1–11. What did Jesus reveal here that these men were greatly lacking?

In this story, there is a major difference between the woman taken in adultery and her accusers on the one hand and Job and his accusers on the other. The woman was guilty. Though she might have been less guilty of sin than those accusing her, there was never a question of her guilt, whatever the mitigating circumstances. In contrast, Job was not guilty, at least in the sense of guilt that his accusers had claimed for him. But even if he had been guilty like this woman, what Job needed from these men was what this woman needed, and what all suffering people need: grace and forgiveness.

“In His act of pardoning this woman and encouraging her to live a better life, the character of Jesus shines forth in the beauty of perfect righteousness. While He does not palliate sin, nor lessen the sense of guilt, He seeks not to condemn, but to save. The world had for this erring woman only contempt and scorn; but Jesus speaks words of comfort and hope.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 462.

What the book of Job should teach us is that we need to give others what we would like were we in their shoes. There is surely a time and place for rebuke, for confrontation, but before we consider taking on that role, we need to remember humbly and meekly that we are sinners ourselves.

How can we learn more compassion for those who are suffering, even suffering from their own wrong courses of action?

More Than Thorns and Thistles

As we all know, and some know too well, life is hard. Right at Eden, after the Fall, we were given some hints of how hard it would be, when the Lord let our first parents know what some of the results of their transgression would be (*see Gen. 3:16–24*). These were just hints though. After all, if the only challenges we faced in life were “thorns and thistles,” human existence would be radically different from how it is today.

We look around, and what do we see but suffering, sickness, poverty, war, crime, depression, pollution, and injustice? The historian of antiquity Herodotus wrote about a culture in which people mourned—yes, *mourned*—when a baby was born, because they knew the inevitable sorrow and suffering that the child would face were he or she to reach adulthood. Seems morbid, but who can refute the logic?

In the book of Job, though, there is a message for us about the human condition. As we saw, Job could be deemed a symbol of all humanity, in that all of us suffer—often in ways that just don’t seem fair, that don’t seem appropriate to whatever sins we have all inevitably committed. It wasn’t fair to Job, and it’s not fair to us.

And yet, in all of this, what the book of Job can say to us is that God is there, God knows, and God promises that it doesn’t all have to be for nothing.

Secular writers, atheistic writers, struggle to come to terms with the meaninglessness of a life that ends forever in death. They struggle and struggle for answers and yet come up with nothing, because this life, in and of itself, offers nothing. There’s an atheistic philosophy called “nihilism,” from a Latin word, *nihil*, which means “nothing.” Nihilism teaches that our world and our lives in the world mean nothing.

The book of Job, though, points us to a transcendent reality beyond the *nihil* that our mortal lives threaten us with. It points us to God and to a realm of existence from which we can draw hope. It tells us that all that happens to us does not happen in a vacuum but that there is a God who knows all about what is happening, a God who promises to make it all right one day. Whatever grand questions the book of Job leaves unanswered, it doesn’t leave us with nothing in our hands but the ashes of our lives (*see Gen. 3:19, Job 2:8*). Instead, it leaves us with the hope of hopes, the hope of something beyond what’s presented to our immediate senses.

What Bible texts explicitly say that we have a great hope that transcends anything this world offers? (*See, for instance, Heb. 11:10, Rev. 21:2.*)

Jesus and Job

Bible students through the ages have sought to find parallels between the story of Job and the story of Jesus. And though Job is not exactly a “type” of Jesus (as were the animals in the sacrificial system), some parallels do exist. In these parallels we can find another lesson from Job: that of what our salvation cost the Lord.

Compare Job 1:1 with 1 John 2:1, James 5:6, and Acts 3:14. What parallels are there?

Read Matthew 4:1–11. What parallels exist here between Jesus and Job?

Read Matthew 26:61; Luke 11:15, 16; and John 18:30. How do these texts parallel the experience of Job?

Compare Job 1:22 with Hebrews 4:15. What parallel exists?

These texts do reveal interesting parallels between the experiences of Job and Jesus. Job, of course, was not sinless, as was Jesus; nevertheless, he was a faithful and righteous man whose life brought glory to the Father. Job was sorely tested by the devil, as was Jesus. All through the book of Job, Job was falsely accused; Jesus, too, faced false accusations.

Finally, and perhaps most important, despite all that happened, Job stayed faithful to the Lord. Much more consequently for us all, Jesus stayed faithful as well. Despite everything that happened to Him, Jesus lived a sinless life, one that perfectly embodied the character of God. Jesus was the “express image of His [God’s] person” (*Heb. 1:3, NKJV*), and thus alone had the righteousness needed for salvation, “even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference” (*Rom. 3:22*).

As great as it all was, Job, his suffering, and his faithfulness amid the suffering was a small and imperfect reflection of what Jesus, his Redeemer, would face in Job’s behalf and in ours, when He will indeed come and “stand at the latter day upon the earth” (*Job 19:25*).

Further Thought: Through the centuries, the book of Job has thrilled, enlightened, and challenged readers in Judaism, Christianity, and even Islam (which has its own variant of the biblical account). We say *challenged* because, as we have seen, in and of itself the book leaves many questions unanswered. On one level, this shouldn't be so surprising. After all, from Genesis to Revelation, what book of the Bible doesn't leave questions unanswered? Even taken as a whole, the Bible doesn't answer every issue that it raises. If the topics it covers, the fall of humanity and the plan of salvation, are subjects that we will be studying throughout eternity (see *The Great Controversy*, p. 678), how could one finite book of it, even one inspired by the Lord (*2 Tim. 3:16*), answer everything for us now?

The book of Job, though, doesn't stand alone. It's part of a much greater picture revealed in the Word of God. And, as part of a grand spiritual and theological mosaic, it presents us with a powerful message, one with universal appeal, at least for all the followers of God. And that message is faithfulness amid adversity. Job is a living example of Jesus' own words: " 'He who endures to the end shall be saved' " (*Matt. 24:13, NKJV*). What believer in Jesus, seeking to do right, hasn't at times faced inexplicable wrong? What believer in Jesus, seeking to be faithful, hasn't faced challenges to faith? What believer in Jesus, seeking comfort, hasn't faced accusations instead? And yet, the book of Job presents us with an example of someone who, facing all this and more, maintained his faith and integrity. And as by faith and by grace we trust in the One who died on the cross for Job, and for us, the message to us is, " 'Go and do likewise' " (*Luke 10:37, NKJV*).

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Place yourself in the mind of a Jew who, knowing the book of Job, lived before the coming of Jesus. What questions do you think that person might have that we today, living after Jesus, don't have? That is, how does the story of Jesus and what He has done for us help us better understand the book of Job?
- 2 When you get to meet Job, what might be the first question you ask him, and why?
- 3 What are some questions and issues that the book of Job touched on that we didn't cover in this quarter?
- 4 What was the main spiritual concept that you got from this study on Job? Share your answers with your class.

Finding Spiritual Meaning

by VOJTECH PEKARIK

I grew up in Košice, Slovakia, a city in the easternmost part of the former Czechoslovakia. When I was 15 my parents divorced. My mother moved to Prague, while I remained with my father.

I wanted to be considered “cool” in high school, so at age 16 I began to smoke and drink. Soon I realized that these drugs left me emptier than before, and I began looking around for something that would really satisfy me.

Our neighbors were quite religious, and when my mother came to visit us, she stayed with this family. They invited us to go to some of their meetings. I began to realize that God does exist, and that He loves and cares about me.

When my father realized that I was seriously interested in religion, he directed me to the family’s traditional belief in Catholicism. He arranged for me to take classes from the priest, and I began attending mass every Sunday.

A few weeks later, I noticed a poster advertising a Bible study group that was forming in our neighborhood. For several months, I attended both the Bible studies in my neighborhood and the doctrinal classes at the Catholic church. The priest heard about the Bible studies and forbade his parishioners to attend. He threatened that anyone who attended the Bible studies would be excommunicated.

But I liked the interesting Bible study sessions. We were encouraged to follow the Bible rather than the teachings of a church—any church. The pastor spoke of the true biblical church. I didn’t know such a church existed and asked the pastor to tell us which church believed these principles. He told us it was the Seventh-day Adventist Church. I had heard the name. In the previous meeting, we had discussed the Sabbath, and I went home and looked “Sabbath” up in the dictionary—a Communist, atheistic dictionary, and it actually named Seventh-day Adventists as Sabbath keepers!

The Bible studies were followed by an evangelistic campaign. Soon I was convinced that the Seventh-day Adventist Church was the true church. When I saw how many young people gave their hearts to Jesus, my heart was touched, too, and I decided to start a new life with Jesus. Eight months after my first Bible study with the Adventists, I was baptized.

Young—and not so young—people still are searching for meaning in life. Your mission offerings help to provide ways for them to find answers. Thank you for giving.

This testimony was adapted from a longer story written by VOJTECH PEKARIK, who studied at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary near Prague, Czech Republic.

The Holy Spirit is central to our Christian experience. The Holy Spirit, as God Himself, knows God as no person can and reveals God to us in a trustworthy and reliable manner. The Holy Spirit first inspired the Bible writers, and the Holy Spirit today guides us in our study of what He had inspired these writers to communicate. The Holy Spirit gives assurance of our salvation through Jesus Christ (*Rom. 8:16*) and gives evidence of God's work in us (*1 John 3:24*). The Holy Spirit also cleanses us from sin and sanctifies us. The Spirit produces in us lifelong growth in holiness, bringing forth the fruit of the Spirit within us—"love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (*Gal. 5:22, 23*).

Because of His crucial role in our lives as believers, this quarter's study, entitled *The Holy Spirit and Spirituality* by Frank Hasel, will help us better to understand the great gift we have in the Holy Spirit.

Lesson 1—The Spirit and the Word

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **The Holy Spirit and Revelation** (*Dan. 2:19–23*)

MONDAY: **The Holy Spirit and Inspiration** (*John 16:13*)

TUESDAY: **The Holy Spirit and the Truthfulness of Scripture** (*Ps. 119:160*)

WEDNESDAY: **The Holy Spirit as Teacher** (*1 Cor. 2:13, 14*)

THURSDAY: **The Holy Spirit and the Word** (*John 5:39, 46, 47*)

Memory Text—*2 Tim. 3:16, 17*

Sabbath Gem: The Holy Spirit works with and through the Written Word to transform us into new creatures in Christ.

Lesson 2—The Holy Spirit: Working Behind the Scenes

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **The Elusiveness of the Holy Spirit** (*John 3:3–8*)

MONDAY: **The Holy Spirit at Creation** (*Gen. 1:2, Ps. 33:6*)

TUESDAY: **The Holy Spirit and the Sanctuary** (*Exod. 31:1–5*)

WEDNESDAY: **The Holy Spirit in Glorifying Jesus Christ** (*John 15:26*)

THURSDAY: **The Holy Spirit and Christ** (*Luke 1:34, 35; Luke 4:1, 2, 14; Heb. 9:14; 1 Pet. 3:18*)

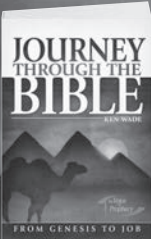
Memory Text—*John 16:14, NKJV*

Sabbath Gem: From the testimony of Scripture, we learn that the Holy Spirit willingly and gracefully accepts a supporting, helping, sustaining, and equipping role behind the scenes.

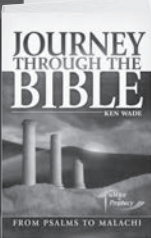
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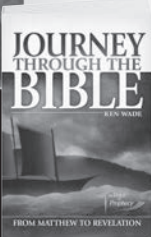
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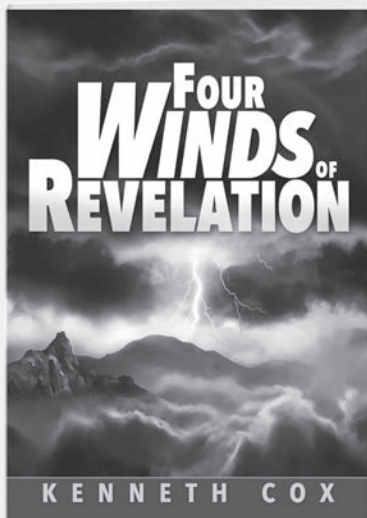
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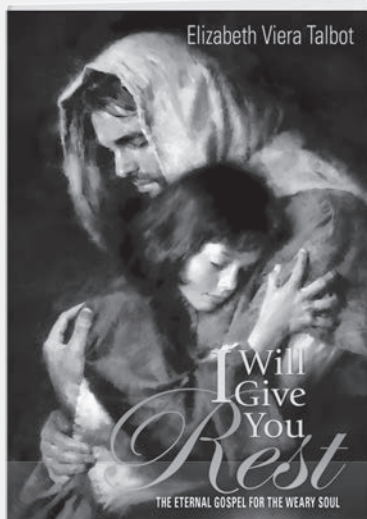


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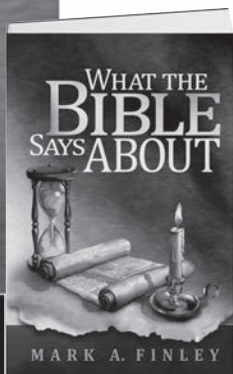
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