

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.