

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*) _____

wKing 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 Lesson in Brief

► **Key Texts:** *Job 42:10, 1 Corinthians 4:5, Job 14:14*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Approach the book of Job from its happy ending and come to the realization that, in the final judgment and resurrection, there is a happy end for God's children.

Feel: Appreciate the reality of life that not all things end happily on this earth but that God restores everything in His time.

Do: Embrace heart change in his or her life as God's way of bringing him or her safely to a happy end.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Looking Forward to a Happy End

A How did God restore Job at the end of his life? Was this a full restoration? Explain.

B Is it in any way possible to speak of a happy end while we are living here on earth? Why, or why not?

II. Feel: Relating to Unhappy Endings

A How do we relate to the unhappy endings in our lives when things do not work out, as in the death of a loved one, loss of employment, or a divorce?

B How can we help other people with their unhappy endings?

III. Do: Embracing True Heart Change

A What was the change that Job experienced through the suffering he went through?

B How does real heart change work?

► **Summary:** We approach the book of Job from its ending, which appears to be a story of "They lived happily ever after." While it is true that God is able to change tragedy into bliss, He does not always do so. Thus, the final point of Job is not so much the restoration of his earthly possessions but the heart change he experienced and that we can experience also.

Learning Cycle

►STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: *Job 42:10*

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Human nature, together with the rest of creation, longs for restoration. While there is sometimes full or partial restoration from suffering here on earth, God has a bigger plan for our lives, which is eternal restoration. This renewal can be accomplished only when we permit Him to change our hearts.

Just for Teachers: If one quantifies Job's restoration at the end of the book, one could come to the conclusion that his suffering paid off (*Job 1:2, 3; 42:12, 13*): from seven to fourteen thousand sheep, from three to six thousand camels, from five hundred oxen and five hundred donkeys to one thousand of each. In each case, God doubled his fortune (except for the seven sons and three daughters who were replaced by the same number). However, while the book of Job mentions material restoration at the end, it does so as an unmerited consequence, even bonus, to Job's inward change of heart that is described earlier in the final chapter (*Job 42:1–9*). In light of this fact, we should make sure that we do not fall prey to a materialistic reading of the final chapter of Job.

Opening Discussion: We all like happy endings. As a matter of fact, something deep inside us longs for a good outcome in everything that pertains to life. How often have we taken up a book and read through the introduction and first few pages only to jump to the concluding chapter in order to find out what happens to our favorite character in the end?

Some have connected our desire for happy endings to socioeconomic issues; for example, people living in a society riddled by economic depression and a gloomy outlook of the future often yearn for a more perfect world. From a Christian perspective, this longing can be connected to the realization of paradise lost and the hope for a new world in which there will be no more tears, sorrow, or death (*Rev. 21:4*).

Is it realistic in this world to look for happy endings? Or is this just an unrealistic, escapist approach to our world's misery? Discuss.

►STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: This lesson study does not start where one would typically expect when studying a biblical book. Specifically,

our study does not begin with an introduction to the book, its author, the date when it was written, major themes, and so on. Instead, it takes a courageous jump right to the end of the book, providing, in this way, a good perspective on the overall theme, which is God’s changing us and (sometimes) also our circumstances.

In focusing on Job’s restoration as a point of departure, we are forced to look at the surprisingly positive outcome to his suffering. At the same time, we need to realize that in this world, not all suffering ends in restoration. Rather, Job’s restoration can serve as a type for God’s final restoration on the new earth, which is dependent on a change of heart and not so much on a change of circumstances.

Bible Commentary

God’s sovereignty has been at the center of the concluding chapters in the book of Job (*Job 38–41*), drawing on images of creation and nature. Without answering Job’s question as to the “Why?” of his suffering, God is portrayed as lovingly yet majestically ruling over His creation. Thus, eventually, Job must acknowledge God as His Creator. This recognition catalyzes the big change, or renewal, that takes place in Job’s heart.

I. Knowing God (*Review Job 42:2–6 with the class.*)

In the beginning verses of this final chapter (*Job 42:2, 3*), Job refers to understanding, knowledge, and counsel five times, indicating that he has come to a deeper understanding of who God is and how He relates to His creation. Even if we question God—and God never criticizes Job for doing so—we eventually have to arrive at Job’s conclusion that we speak of things we do not understand (*Job 42:3b, compare with Prov. 16:9*). Job’s repentance in the next verse is neither a belated admission of his guilt nor support of his friends’ retribution theology but, rather, recantation of his earlier legal claim against God. He bows as a finite creature before the infinite wisdom of Yahweh (*compare with Gen. 18:27*).

Consider This: Contemplating your life, when were the times that you got to know God most intimately? Why do you think those are most often times of suffering and sorrow?

II. Retribution Theology (*Review Job 42:7–10 with the class.*)

A superficial reading of the last chapter of the book of Job could lead

to the understanding that, right at the end, retribution theology finally won: Job never sinned, God finally acknowledges that fact, and, in retribution, He restores Job to his previous fortunes and beyond, doubling his possessions (*Job 42:10*). After all, Job's friends had been right: the bad suffer for their sin, and the righteous triumph in their justice, even if it sometimes takes a little longer for God to come through. Case closed.

Retribution theology is a dangerous mind-set, but ever present, especially when disaster strikes. It assumes a direct relationship between a person's and God's actions. If we are good, then blessings will come; if we are bad, divine punishment will follow suit. This is the theology of Job's friends Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, propagated by them throughout the book and vehemently fought against by Job. What we need to realize is that this theology turns God into a predictable deity who works by fixed formulas, ignoring His sovereignty and making Him susceptible to humankind's manipulations. We might even be justified in this way of thinking if it were not for the distinct divine declaration at the end of the book of Job, which presents a clear value judgment on this type of distorted theology: " 'You have not spoken of Me what is right, as My servant Job has' " (! (*Job 42:8, NKJV*).

God, in His wisdom, wants to make sure that no traces of this seductive theological fabrication stay behind at the end of the book. He does so by speaking directly, and rather severely, to Job's friends. However, He also provides restoration for the erring friends. The righteous Job intercedes on behalf of his misguided friends, and Job's restoration is then connected to his intercession (*Job 42:9, 10*). His deeper friendship with, and knowledge of, God translates itself into a blessing on his human relationships.

Consider This: How must Job's friends have felt at the end of the story? Was God too severe in His judgment of their theology? Why, or why not?

III. The Three Daughters of Job (*Review Job 42:13–15 with the class.*)

The mention of Job's three daughters by name—in contrast to the seven unnamed sons—restored to Job at the end of the book has puzzled commentators throughout the ages. Some have allegorically connected the ten children with the Ten Commandments (the first three represented by the daughters, the other seven by the sons); others have seen the Trinity represented in the three daughters. An eschatological meaning in the names of the three girls has been suggested: for example, Jemimah means "day by day" or "dove" and points to the resurrection day or the Holy Spirit; Keziah is the aromatic bark of the cassia tree, supposedly referring to the "Anointed One," the Messiah; and Keren-happuch means "horn of antimony," a colored powder used as eye make-up, usually stored in a horn, which eschatologically might point to the beauty and abundance of eternal life.

While all biblical names have meanings, it is probably safer to stay away from these spiritualizing speculations; but the special mention of the daughters' names, their exceptional beauty, and their unusual inclusion in the inheritance law (*compare with Numbers 36*) points to the fact that the story once more upsets our expectations and conventions. As much as Job's friends were not correct in their understanding of God, it is now not just the sons but also Job's daughters—and more emphatically so—who carry on Job's legacy. Thus, Job's heritage is a universal one. Job's three beautiful daughters extend the narrative beyond the expected, inasmuch as God's answer goes beyond retribution theology.

Consider This: What are our fixed ideas about God and our personal theologies that have to be revisited and revised?

►STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: Retribution theology is such an easy trap to fall into. So often we make quick connections between suffering and God's punishment. As teachers we need to make sure to address this fallacy.

Thought/Application Questions:

- ❶ Why is retribution theology so tempting to believe in real life?
- ❷ What can you do in your church and community to promote true heart religion?

►STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: Job is such a practical book, inasmuch as it connects to the universal experience of suffering.

Class/Individual Activities:

- ❶ Look at the beauty of creation by watching nature photos or a nature movie. You might also want to take a nature walk with your class. Think about God's majesty and His sovereignty in the universe.

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- ❷ Present examples of restoration. By way of illustration, a beautifully renovated old house, a restored painting, a patient restored to health, and so on. Compare them to Job's restoration.
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