

The Jobs: Living *With* Losses



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Job 1:1–2:10.*

Memory Text: “He replied, ‘You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?’” (*Job 2:10, NIV*).

The nature of the book of Job, similar to what’s called Wisdom literature, and the names of the characters in the story suggest an Edomite setting. The closest we can get to a name in the Bible similar to Job’s is an Edomite king, Jobab (*Gen. 36:33*).

Job’s wife’s name isn’t given. In fact, not much is said about her at all. In the whole Bible, she’s quoted in only one verse, and based upon that quote—uttered amid pain and tragedy that most people couldn’t imagine—she’s been remembered. She, though, may have been the model wife in every way, caring for her household, ministering to her suffering husband, taking food to him at the dump, nursing his boils, etc. But those good acts are not recorded; instead, the emphasis is on her husband and his suffering, with her only appearance being her urging him to do the very thing that Satan wanted.

Both husband and wife, as a couple, suffered with their losses; each one, though, reacted differently to them. We’re not called to judge him or her but to learn and to take heed.

The Week at a Glance: The story of Job and his wife reveals early on the reality of tragedy and suffering here on earth.

**Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 1.*

The Story of Job

For thousands of years the story of Job has inspired, baffled, and challenged readers. God alone knows how many books, commentaries, and essays have been written on this ancient book that, along with Genesis, are the two oldest books in the Bible, both written by Moses in Midian. “The long years spent 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, *Signs of the Times*, Feb. 19, 1880.

Read Job 1:1–2:8. What do these texts tell us about the character and nature of Job? What is it about his nature and character that make all the things that happen to him even harder to understand?

It’s interesting that the book of Job should be, along with Genesis, the first books of the Bible to be written. It’s as if the Lord knew, right from the start, that one of the great questions facing human beings would be the question of evil. If the God of heaven is so loving and so powerful, why is there so much pain and suffering on earth? For many people this question poses the greatest challenge to faith.

Thus, right from the start, the Lord, with the book of Job, along with Genesis, gives us the background of the great controversy theme. We are taken behind the scenes and shown things that—even with all our telescopes and other fancy scientific devices—we would otherwise never see. Though not answering all the questions, the book of Job shows us, if nothing else, that suffering, pain, and calamity have hardly caught God by surprise. Hence, they shouldn’t take us by surprise either, and they certainly don’t present valid reasons for rejecting the God of Scripture.

Write out a paragraph explaining, the best you can, your understanding of why suffering exists in the world despite God’s love for it. Be prepared to bring your answer to class on Sabbath.

I Have to Teach Tomorrow . . .

► **Key Text:** *Job 2:10*

► **Teach the Class to:**

Know: Bad things happen to good people.

Feel: They can turn to Jesus for healing in crises.

Do: Uplift others with their words.

► **Lesson Outline:**

I. Fire, Wind, Blood (*Job 1:8–22, 31*)

A Five hundred yoke of oxen and she-donkeys stolen by the Sabeans; the servants put to the sword; 7,000 sheep burned to ashes, along with their shepherds; 3,000 camels stolen by the Chaldeans; a tornado-force wind demolishing the house, killing all ten of Job’s children. All this happens *within the same hour*. But Job “fell down upon the ground, and worshipped” (*Job 1:20*). Why was this his response after such staggering loss?

B Satan argues that Job will curse God “to thy face” if stricken with disease. Boils burst out all over Job’s body. Why are our efforts to remove sin as effective as Job’s potsherd that merely scrapes at his boils?

II. Job’s Wife: A Second Look (*Job 2:9, 19:17*)

A Job’s wife tells him to “curse God, and die.” What kind of effect do our words have? In what ways can we use them to uplift our spouses?

B Job says that his breath “is strange to my wife,” alluding to the smell of his rotting flesh. It wouldn’t smell like that if she stayed away from him. Obviously, her devotion to her husband is not just in health and in wealth. Does love have to suffer when we suffer? Why, or why not?

III. A Look at Ourselves (*Job 31:1, 42:12–17*)

A Job doesn’t just make a marriage vow with his *body*; he makes it with his eyes. What does it mean to make a “covenant with mine eyes” as Job did?

B Jemima, Keziah, and Kerenhappuch—the daughters of Job born to him after his scourge—are so beautiful the Bible records their names (unlike his sons who are referred to only by number). How has God restored what you’ve lost?

Remember Job's Wife

Read over again the calamities that befell this couple. Only now put yourself in Job's wife's place. What must have been going on in this poor woman's mind?

Though the story of Job centers on him and his sufferings, we mustn't forget his wife. It was her servants, too, who were destroyed; it was the property that she benefited from that was destroyed; and it was her children, the fruit of her womb, that were suddenly killed. Then to top it off, it was her husband, the person with whom she had become "one flesh" (*Gen. 2:24*), who was suddenly struck down with loathsome sores and boils. Whatever Job himself suffered, she suffered the same, maybe even more. One should easily understand her distress. As the Bible presents the story, however, she's given only one line out of 42 full chapters. Obviously, more went on behind the scenes than what's revealed to us here.

Read Job 2:9. Focus particularly on her question. What's implied in it?

In Job 1:1, Job is described as someone who was *tam vyahsar*, translated "blameless and upright" (*NIV*). It's interesting that in her question "Do you still hold fast to your integrity?" (*Job 2:9, NKJV*), the word for "integrity" is from the same word for "blameless" in Job 1:1, which in Hebrew also means "complete" or "perfect" (*see also Gen. 6:9, 17:1, Pss. 37:37, 64:4*). It's also the same word that God uses to describe Job once in Job 1:8 and twice in Job 2:3 ("perfect," "integrity"). Thus, exactly how Job is described four times is the specific point about his character that she is now questioning. *How can you still stay so "blameless" before God with all these things happening to us?* Again, we mustn't forget that this couple shared these calamities; what happened to Job wasn't much different from what happened to her.

The idea here is that these things shouldn't happen to us if we are "blameless" before God. What's wrong with that kind of thinking? At the same time, in what ways does being "blameless" bring benefits even now to our lives?

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1—Motivate!**

Just for Teachers: Step 1 of the Natural Learning Cycle links the learners' experiences to the lesson. Help your class members answer this question, *Why is this lesson important to me?*

We have all heard that God works good in all things to those who love Him (*see Rom. 8:28*). Job's story prevents this truth from ever seeming like a mere platitude and brings into luminous display the issues of the great controversy between good and evil as it affects the lives of us all on a profoundly personal basis. It also presents a sterling example of how a person of faith may endure the most agonizing trials and formidable tests of character. Job's proverbial patience (*see James 5:11*) was not a species of bland fatalism. Rather, it was an enduring force that enabled him to weather storms and surmount the barriers that Satan devises to obscure humanity's vision of God as He truly is—a God of love, gracious providence, protective vigilance, and infinite mercy.

Consider This: Many of the sufferings that befall Christians are not the result of God's displeasure but the result of His high calling for our lives to refine our character by making us partakers of Christ's sufferings. Paul related to such suffering as a creative opportunity to become a heaven-molded, empathetic comforter of the afflicted (*Rom. 15:1–6, 2 Cor. 1:3–11, 1 Thess. 3:1–9*).

How do you deal with suffering, setbacks, and losses? Do these trying developments weaken your faith or strengthen it? What reasons do you have for your answer?

► **STEP 2—Explore!**

Just for Teachers: This step of the Natural Learning Cycle presents information learners can use to help them better understand the lesson. Help your class members answer this question, *What do I need to know from God's Word?*

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Satan's Temptresses

Review Genesis 3:1–13. What parallels can you find between this story and the story of Job and his wife?

There are several similarities in the story of Adam and the story of Job. First, both men were “perfect” and “complete,” at least in their respective spheres. Second, both were facing tests that dealt with, literally, cosmic issues. Third, both their wives were victimized by Satan, though in different ways. Fourth, in both cases Satan used the wives as instruments of temptation against their husbands.

Read again Satan's charges against Job (*Job 1:7–11, 2:3–5*). In what way is Job's wife, however unwittingly, being used by Satan against her own husband?

Job's wife surely didn't know any more about the cosmic drama unfolding behind the scenes than did her husband. Satan was duping her, using her for his ends. Satan took advantage of Eve amid the bliss and happiness of Eden; in contrast, he took advantage of Job's wife amid unspeakable pain and suffering. Our cruel foe will use whatever he can, and whomever he can, in any circumstances he can, in order to lead us into sin and away from God. We should also note that Adam, sinless and in the bliss and perfection of Eden, succumbed to the deceptions; Job, a fallen being living amid terrible pain and suffering, didn't. What a testimony to the integrity of Job.

Ask yourself, male or female, What can I do to make sure that I never place myself in a position where I am tempting someone either wittingly or unwittingly, especially someone close to me, to do the wrong thing?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED**Bible Commentary****I. The Story of Job**

Job's story unveils the hidden dynamics of much of life's drama for everyone on earth. We are all, in our own way, like Job. Satan seeks to encompass our ruin through temptations and trials that seem to be arbitrary acts of God, while actually of malevolent demonic origin. On the other hand, God employs every loving, honest means possible to save us from ruin and to restore us to our originally intended status as sons and daughters of His, and as partakers of the divine nature (*Heb. 12:3–10, Rev. 3:19–22*).

Satan was determined to discredit God and justify his own rebellion by exposing Job as a time-serving sycophant whose professed love for God was firmly anchored in self-interest (*Job 1, 2*). God knew of Job's unfeigned devotion to Him and allowed Satan to put Job's faith and character to a series of extreme tests that categorically span the entire range of human suffering. Job was God's model servant. He knew His man well. Job's loyalty, through the power of divine grace, may be just as strongly interwoven in our hearts. Moreover, we have God's explanation of the issues behind the scenes that were hidden from Job's view while he was in the thick of his tribulations.

Consider This: Job candidly (but not rancorously) questioned God's permitting (or causing) so many catastrophes to descend on him. Although utterly mystified by these thick clouds of calamity, Job was supported by the one indispensable quality that enables all the afflicted to finally overcome—faith that is rooted and grounded in the knowledge of God (*Job 13:15, 16; 14:12–15; 19:22–29; compare with Rom. 8:29–34; 1 John 4:4; 5:4, 5*). Job's faith was not simplistic or sentimental—it was braced with the sinew of tried experience and the tensile strength of persevering confidence in the living God who conquers darkness, despair, and death through the deathless power of the gospel.

II. Job's Wife

Job faced the dual challenge of misdirected reproof from his friends whose original intent was to comfort him, and from his wife, who construed their sufferings as an unjust visitation from God. She counseled her husband to “curse God and die.” She must have eventually repented

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Curse God and Die!

Satan's whole point against God was that Job was "blameless" only because God was so good to him and that the moment things went bad, Job would turn against Him. Twice Satan said that Job would "curse" God to His face. As we saw, the exact thing that Satan said Job would do was the exact thing that his wife told him to do. Again, how careful we need to be with the words we speak, especially in moments of intense emotions.

What do the following texts say about the power and importance of words? *Prov. 13:3; 25:11; Eccles. 10:12; Matt. 12:36, 37; John 5:24.*

Commentators on the book of Job have noticed one very interesting point. When Satan says twice that Job will "curse" God to His face and when Job's wife tells him to "curse" God, the typical Hebrew words for "curse" aren't used. Instead, the word comes from the root *brk*, which commonly means "bless" (*Gen. 12:2, Exod. 12:32, Ruth 2:4, Ps. 26:12*). The psalmist writes about *blessing* (from *brk*) the Lord (*Pss. 16:7, 26:12, 34:1*). Now, though, in Job, the same word is translated *curse*. (In Job 1:5 the word *curse* is also from *brk*; also in 1 Kings 21:10, the same use of *brk* appears.)

Read those verses we've looked at in Job where the root *brk* is translated "curse," but the word *bless* is put in instead. What happens?

Clearly the texts don't make sense if *brk* here were to mean *bless*. Maybe in the case of Job's wife, one could argue that she was being sarcastic (as was Satan before God): *Sure, Job, why not bless God for all His goodness to us and then die!* However, seeing how it's used, for instance, in Job 1:5, it's clear that this is just one of the idioms of language in which words are used in unexpected ways.

How careful are you with your words? What can you do to make sure that you don't say things that you will regret later, things that can bring suffering upon yourself and others?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

of these rash and irreverent words. But in the account as presented in the book of Job, her role was disappointingly unexemplary and stands as a clangorous warning that anger toward God for any reason whatever is wholly unwarranted. It simply exacerbates the misery of all who are exposed to its manifestation. Truly, as James stated, “The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God” (*James 1:20*).

Consider This: Who is the paramount exemplar of patience in suffering? (*Psalms 22, Isaiah 53, Mark 15:9–37*). What can we learn (not just theologically but in the depths of our hearts) by considering Christ’s example as the Prince of sufferers? (*1 Pet. 2:21–25*).


► **STEP 3—Practice!**

Just for Teachers: This step of the learning cycle will assist you in helping your class members find the answer to the following question: **How can I practice the information I just learned?**

Job ardently sought for answers, but he did not insist that he must have a full explanation of every issue related to his baffling ordeal. In fact, the more his friends barraged him with sanitary truisms, the more Job insisted that life held inscrutable mysteries which could not all be tidily summarized in aphoristic packages. (*See Job 12–14, 19, 26–28.*) But in the midst of all his uncertainty, Job knew that his Redeemer lives and that He would bring ultimate resolution to life’s greatest mysteries and inequities, with perfect justice and mercy combined. But Job’s plea was for his friends not to barricade themselves behind moralistic exhortations as a substitute for compassionate understanding. (*See Job 6, 7, 16.*) God took it further. He accused these polished moralizers of making erroneous suppositions about Himself and His ways (*see Job 42:7, 8*). Thus they had misjudged Job and lost the opportunity to be a comfort to him.

Thought Questions:

The tide of Job’s suffering was turned when he prayed for his friends. Much of human suffering directly stems from a rupture in our relationship with others. What lessons can we learn from Job’s intercession for those who had proven to be such “miserable comforters” to him? What effect does such praying have in the heart of one who so prays? (*Matt. 5:10–12; Luke 6:22, 23*).

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Supporting Each Other

Job's wife must have been his support in most ways during his ordeal. She must have suffered as she prepared his meals and bathed his sores. His gaunt body and peeling skin must have tore at her heart. She alone ventured close enough to get hit by his foul breath (*Job 19:17*). When she finally broke down, it was not against him, neither was it for her own sake, but for his. She had kept her cool as asset after asset disappeared. She is not recorded as uttering any unbecoming word when her ten children were felled in one blow. But the sight of her suffering husband was the last straw in the series of undeserving reverses. Hers was a righteous indignation.

Read Job 2:10. What was the essence of Job's reaction? What did it say about his faithfulness to God, even despite great pain?

In response to his wife's outburst, Job does not call *her* foolish. He says she speaks *like* one of the foolish women. She is not a foolish woman, and this is not her normal behavior; it is unbecoming of her. Thus, Job's words seem to indicate something about her; that she was, under normal circumstances, not one of the "foolish" women. This, though, wasn't a normal circumstance at all.

What wrong idea did Job express in regard to the nature of his suffering?

Even though Job wrongly attributes his suffering to God, he seeks to stay faithful to God anyway. His use of the words *good* and *evil* are the same Hebrew words used in Genesis 2:17 to describe the forbidden tree. Humans were never to know evil, only good. Evil doesn't come from God; it comes only from a deviation or falling away from God. Evil, though, has become so pervasive that even the blameless suffer from it. Of course, of all the blameless ones to suffer from sin, none was more blameless than Jesus, and no one suffered from evil more than He did (*Isa. 53:3–6, 2 Cor. 5:21, 1 Pet. 2:24, 4:1*).

Read the first chapter of 1 Peter. What message does he have there that parallels the story of the Jobs? Then ask yourself, How well do I hold up under suffering? What lessons do I need to learn that will better enable me to remain faithful regardless of the circumstances?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED► **STEP 4—Apply!**

Just for Teachers: In this fourth and final step of the Natural Learning Cycle, you will want to encourage class members to make a life response to the lesson. Help them to answer this question, **With God’s help, what can I do with what I have learned from this lesson?**

“Learn the lessons of meekness and lowliness in the school of Christ. Realize how much he bore for us, and then count it not a mark of God’s anger that you have some trials to bear for Jesus. If you trust God, the trials will always prove a blessing, and your faith will come forth the brighter, the stronger, the purer. Satan is always trying to press the soul into distrust of God, and therefore we must educate the mind to trust him. Talk faith and hope when Satan says, as did the wife of Job, ‘Curse God, and die.’ If you trust God, you will see more reason to trust him. As you talk of his goodness, you will see more of his love to talk about. Thus the mind may be trained to live in the brightness of the Sun of righteousness, and not in the shadow which Satan casts athwart our path. Hope in God, who is the health of our countenance, and our God.”—Ellen G. White, *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, September 1, 1891.

Consider This: The preceding passage contains vital spiritual and psychological principles. The expression of faith augments our faith and banishes gloom; the expression of despair and distrust intensifies our misery and pushes us toward a hopeless outlook. Thus, we should learn to praise God (*Pss. 34:1, 42, 43, 71:14, 86:12*).

What effect does it have on our minds and faith when we keep ever in view the triumphant outcome of the great controversy that assures us that truth and love will prevail over falsehood and hatred? Read afresh Daniel 12 and Revelation 21 and 22. (*See also Matt. 24:13, Heb. 10:32–39, 12:1–5.*)

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “A Happy, Successful Partnership,” pp. 105–113, in *The Adventist Home*.

“We know very little about this woman, and the tendency has been to consider her an evil woman. Undoubtedly Job’s suffering caused her to suffer as well. Losing all her wealth was painful, but even more emotionally and psychologically devastating would have been losing all her children. Her pain may have been even more intense than her husband’s. Yet in the story she bears her pain quietly. She loved Job. It must have been extremely painful for her to see her husband going through excruciating physical, psychological, and spiritual pain and be unable to do anything to bring relief. There seems to be only one way left for her. She speaks to Job from the depth of her love and concern for him. She doesn’t realize that, like Peter, she is echoing Satan’s words. No, she is not a foolish woman, but that day she spoke ‘like’ one.”—Ángel Rodríguez, *Adventist Review*, April 13, 2000, p. 27.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 As a class, read aloud your answers to Sunday’s final question. What can you learn from each other? How good are the answers? What questions remain unanswered? How can we help each other live with unanswered questions about pain and suffering?
- 2 What are practical ways in which spouses can work to encourage, uplift, and help each other spiritually, as opposed to being instruments of temptation and the cause that makes it easier for the other to stumble?
- 3 Is there someone in your church who has recently suffered a tragedy? What can you do as a class, in a practical way, to encourage that person and to help him or her work through the grief?
- 4 As a class, talk about the idea of taking the name of the Lord in vain. What are examples of how we might even unwittingly be guilty of that sin? Think about phrases, curses, idioms, and slang words in your own language as you discuss the answer.

Summary: The Jobs bore their reverses with equanimity. Even though she may have suffered more than Job, the wife broke down only when she could no longer bear to see the pain her husband was in. We can look to them for inspiration when we are faced with similar losses that pale in comparison with theirs.