

Curse the Day



SABBATH—OCTOBER 22

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Job 3:1–10; John 11:11–14; Job 6:1–3; Job 7:1–11; James 4:14; Job 7:17–21; Psalm 8:4–6.

MEMORY VERSE: “You are worthy to receive glory [great praise] and honor and power. You are worthy because you created all things. They were created and they exist [live]” (Revelation 4:11, NlrV).

AS WE READ THE STORY OF JOB, we have two clear advantages: (1) knowing how it ends and (2) knowing that the war between Christ and Satan is going on at the same time.

Job knows none of this. All he knows is that he is going along in his life just fine. Then suddenly one terrible event after another happens to him. And so, this man, “the greatest of all the people of the East” (Job 1:3, NKJV), finds himself mourning and grieving on a pile of ashes.

As we continue to study Job, let us put ourselves in Job's position. Doing so will help us better understand the confusion, the anger, and the sorrow that he is going through. In one way, putting ourselves in Job's position should not be very hard for us, should it? Of course, we have not experienced what Job has. But who among us sinful humans has not experienced the pain and confusion that causes sadness and suffering? And how much more do we suffer when we try to serve the Lord faithfully and do what is right for Him?

LET THE DAY PERISH (DIE) (Job 3:1–10)

Imagine that you are Job. Your life—all that you have worked for, all that you have done with God’s blessing—comes crashing down around you. It just does not make sense. There does not seem to be any reason, good or bad, for it.

Years ago, a school bus went off the road, killing many of the children on board. One atheist¹ said that this terrible event is the kind of thing you can expect in a world that has no meaning, no purpose, no direction. A terrible event like that has no meaning. The atheist would say it has no meaning because the world itself has no meaning.

But this answer does not work for the believer in God. And for Job, a faithful follower of the Lord, this answer does not work either. But what is the answer? What is the explanation? Job does not have one. All he has is his great sadness and all the questions that follow it.

Read Job 3:1–10. How does Job first explain his sadness here? In what ways might any of us understand what he is saying?

Life, of course, is a gift from God. We live only because God has created us (Acts 17:28; Revelation 4:11). Our very life is a miracle. Life has puzzled modern science. Indeed, even scientists do not agree on what “life” means. They do not know how it came about or why it did.

When depressed (very sad), who has not wondered if life was worth it? We are not talking about the unfortunate cases of suicide. Rather, what about the times we might have, like Job, wished that we had not been born?

A Greek who lived during Bible times once said that the best thing that could happen to a person would be not being born at all. He meant that life can be so terrible at times that we would have been better off not even living. And this means we then would have been saved from much suffering that comes with human life in this sinful world.

Have you ever felt the way Job felt here? Have you wished that you had never been born? But then later you felt better. How important it is for us to remember, then, even in our worst moments, that we have the future hope that things will be better?

DEFINITIONS

1. atheist—a person who does not believe God exists.

REST IN THE GRAVE (Job 3:11–26)

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



Job lost all ten of his children at once.

We can only imagine the terrible sorrow that poor Job is facing. How hard it must have been to have his property destroyed and his health taken away from him! Job even loses his children. It is hard enough to imagine the pain of losing one child. But Job loses them all. And he has ten! No wonder he wishes that he were dead. And again, Job has no idea that the great controversy between Christ and Satan is the cause of what is happening to him. But it probably would not have made him feel better if he had known it, would it?

But notice what Job says about death. If he had died, then what? The happiness of heaven? The joy of being with God? Playing a harp with the angels? There is nothing of that kind of religion in the Bible. 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 (the book of Job), we have what is perhaps one of the earliest explanations of what we call the “state of the dead.”² All Job wants is to be “at rest.” Life suddenly has become so hard, so difficult, and so painful that he wishes for what he knew death is, a peaceful rest in the tomb. He is so sad, so hurt, that he forgets all the joy he had in life before the bad events came. He wishes he had died even at his birth.

As Christians, we certainly have wonderful promises for the future. But suppose, at the same time, we suffer terrible things. So how can we learn to remember the good times we had in the past and to draw comfort from them?

DEFINITIONS

2. state of the dead—the belief or teaching that when a person dies, his or her spirit does not continue to live on separate from the body.

OTHER PEOPLE'S PAIN (Job 6:2, 3)

Job finishes his period of mourning, 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.

“ I wish my great pain could be weighed! I wish all my suffering could be weighed on scales! I'm [I am] sure they would weigh more than the grains of sand on the seashore' ” (Job 6:2, 3, NIV). How is Job explaining his pain?

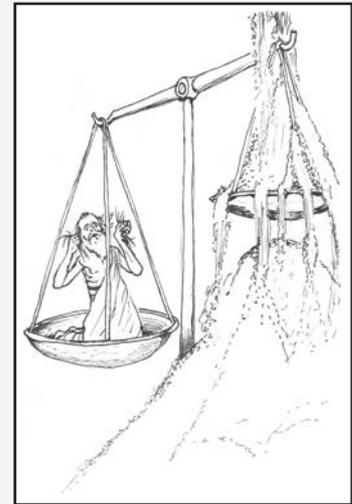
This language gives us an idea about how Job pictures his suffering. If all the sands of the sea were on one side of the balances and his sadness and the terrible events he suffered on the other, his sufferings would outweigh all the sand.

That is how real Job's pain is to him. And this pain is Job's pain alone, no one else's. Sometimes we hear the idea of the “sum total of human suffering.” But this idea does not really come close to the truth. We do not suffer in groups. We do not suffer anyone's pain but our own. We know only our own pain, only our own suffering. Job's pain might be great, but it was no greater than what any one individual could ever know. Some people might mean well when they say to someone, “I feel your pain.” But they really do not. They cannot. All they can feel is their own pain that might come in answer to someone else's suffering. But that is always their own pain, not the other person's.

We hear about disasters, human-made or otherwise, with many people killed. The numbers of dead or injured shock us. It is hard to imagine such great suffering. But as with Job, every person from Adam and Eve in Eden to the end of this world can know only his or her own pain and no more.

Of course, we never want to make light of how much pain one person can suffer. As Christians we are called to help lessen hurt when and where we can (read James 1:27; Matthew 25:34–40). But no matter how much suffering goes on in the world, how thankful we can be that not one person suffers more than what he or she can bear. (There is only one exception, which we will read about in lesson 12.)

Think more deeply about this idea that human suffering is limited only to each person. How does this help you to understand the troubling issue of human suffering in a somewhat different light?



If all the sands of the sea were on one side of the balances and his sadness on the other, Job's sufferings would outweigh all the sand.

THE WEAVER'S SHUTTLE³ (Job 7:1–11)

Just like thread that is measured out and cut to fit the weaver's shuttle, Job complains that our lives are hard, full of difficult work and pain, and then we die.

DEFINITIONS

3. shuttle—a pointed tool that is used to weave cloth by pulling a thread from side to side across other threads. The weaver's shuttle is a word picture to help us to understand that life comes to an end because of sin. God is the Weaver. The thread is a symbol of each life. The Weaver (God) measures out the thread to a certain length. And then it ends. This ending is a symbol that all life must end in death.

4. resurrection—return to life from the dead.

Imagine the following conversation. Two people are complaining about what will happen one day to all people: death. No matter how good the lives they live are and no matter what they do, everything is going to end in the grave.

“Yeah,” complains Methuselah to a friend. “We live, some 800 or 900 years, and then we are gone. What is 800 or 900 years in comparison with eternity?” (Read Genesis 5.)

It is 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.) Even the antediluvians (people who lived before the Flood) would someday have to face death. They must have complained about life being too short.

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

We just saw Job wishing for the rest and relief that would come from death. Now he is complaining how quickly life goes by. He is saying, basically, that life is hard, full of hard work and pain, and then we die. Here is a puzzle we often face: we complain about how fast and short life is, even when that life can be so sad and uncomfortable.

In times of pain and suffering, so many things do not seem to make sense. Sometimes, amid our pain, we lose our ability to think carefully. All we know is our hurt and fear, and we have no hope. Even Job, who really knows better (Job 19:25), cries out in his depression and hopelessness: “ ‘Oh, remember that my life is a breath [very short]! My eye will never again see good’ ” (Job 7:7, NKJV). To Job, death now seems nearer than ever. But he still complains about how short that life is, no matter how unhappy it is at the time.

How should your understanding of the Fall, of death, and of the promise of the resurrection⁴ help you understand the whole question of how fast life goes by?

“MAH ENOSH?” (“WHAT IS MAN?”) (Job 7:17–21)

Again, we must put ourselves in Job’s position. *Why is God doing all this to me?*

Who has not been in a situation like this?

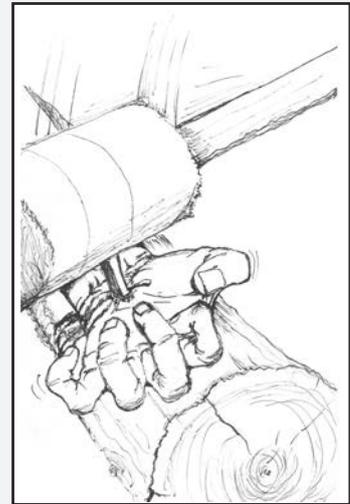
Read Job 7:17–21. What is Job saying here? What questions is he asking? When we think about Job’s situation, why do the questions make so much sense?

Some Bible thinkers have argued that Job is sneering at (speaking with disrespect toward) Psalm 8:4–6, which reads: “What is a human being [person] that you think about him? What is a son of man that you take care of him? You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings [angels]. You placed on him a crown of glory [great praise] and honor. You made human beings [people] the rulers over all that your hands have created. You put everything under their control” (NIRV; read also Psalm 144:3, 4). But the problem is that Job was written long before the Psalms. In that case, then, perhaps the psalmist wrote in answer to Job’s deep sorrow.

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, he believes that God has “marked” him for sorrow and suffering. For this reason, he is wondering why God bothers with him. God is so huge. 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 verses help us understand why God is involved with people?

“John sees the height, the depth, and the width of the Father’s love toward all humans [people]. He [John] is filled with admiration and respect for God. He cannot find the right language to explain God’s love. But he calls upon the world to look upon it: ‘How great is the love the Father has given us so freely! Now we can be called children of God’ [NIRV]. What a value this puts upon men and women and children! Through sin, humans [people] were put under Satan’s control. Through the unlimited sacrifice of Christ, and faith in His name, the sons of Adam become the sons of God. By accepting human nature, Christ puts humans on a higher level.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Testimonies*⁵ for the Church, volume 4, page 563.



Through the unlimited sacrifice of Christ, and faith in His name, the sons of Adam become the sons of God.

DEFINITIONS

5. *Testimonies*—the writings of Ellen G. White.

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: “Today we are living in a time when people worship science and reason. So the ‘good news’ of Christianity has become less and less believable to them and less important. The belief in the gospel as a foundation upon which to build one’s life has become weaker and is thought to be less necessary. To this way of thinking, God’s death on the cross for humans seemed unlikely to have ever happened. That one short life [Jesus’] taking place two thousand years ago in an unimportant nation [Israel] was as unimportant as one star among billions in a very huge and uncaring universe. So Jesus’ death on the cross and [His] resurrection could no longer be an important belief for reasonable men. It was impossible that the universe as a whole would have any interest in what happened here on this tiny planet.”—Adapted from Richard Tarnas, *Passion of the Western Mind* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1991), page 305. What is the problem with this thought? What is the author missing? What does Tarnas’s statement teach us about the limits of what “science and reason” can know about God and His love for us? What does this way of thinking show us about the need for Bible truth? (Bible truth is the 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 do not 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 about our beloved dead? Can we not receive some comfort in knowing that they are at peace, at rest, free from so many of life’s problems and troubles?
- ③ Why do you think that, even in the most terrible of situations, most people hold on to life, no matter how bad that life seems to be?
- ④ Discuss what the Cross teaches us about the value of humans and about the value of even one life.