

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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