

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 the 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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The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Texts:** *Job 7:7–21, Psalm 8:4–6, John 11:11–14*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Explore the biblical concept of the belief about the state of the dead as communicated in Job’s laments.

Feel: Empathize with Job as he expresses his suffering in the most dramatic language and imagery.

Do: Embrace the biblical view of humankind, which finds its most amazing expression in Christ becoming Man and dying for us.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: The State of the Dead

A How far has the belief in the immortality of the soul penetrated modern culture?

B What are the practical implications of the biblical belief that the dead “sleep” when a loved one dies?

II. Feel: Suffering With Job

A What is worse: Job’s suffering or our own suffering? Explain.

B How can I maintain empathy in the face of nonstop news images that document human suffering around the world?

III. Do: State of the Living

A How would you answer the existential question of Job, “Who is man?”

B How does Christ’s life and death contribute to answering the question?

► **Summary:** Suffering and death are closely intertwined in the book of Job, and thoughts of dying (or cursing the day of his birth) run through the lament chapters of Job. From his suffering, we can learn about death, but also about life, and how God in Christ conquered death and sin. A biblical knowledge of these life-and-death issues should make us more ready to empathize with the people around us who are suffering.

Learning Cycle

►STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: *Job 6:1–3*

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: The English word *compassion* comes from the Latin prefix *com* (“together”) and verb *pati* (“suffer”). When we are compassionate, we are suffering together with the person who is experiencing suffering. Job’s suffering, which brought him physically and emotionally to the threshold of death, invites us to share in his suffering and learn about life and death from a biblical perspective. However, while our ability to have compassion will always remain limited, God sent His Son to suffer with and for us.

Just for Teachers: This week’s lesson study could be viewed as a bit moribund as we discuss Job’s strong sentiments toward his sufferings: he curses the day of his birth (*Job 3:1–10*), ponders the futility of life, and contemplates his own death (*Job 7:1–11*). However, it is important to realize that these ruminations devolve out of the biblical worldview of an individual who does not consider suicide as one of his options. While Job definitely shows signs of depression, his thoughts of death are directed toward wanting God to allow him to die in order to bring an end to his sufferings.

Opening Discussion: An old American Indian proverb says that in order to understand a man, you should walk a mile in his moccasins. A number of variations to this saying exist, but the idea remains the same: we need to put ourselves in somebody else’s place in order to really understand how this person is doing and what he or she is going through.

The following example illustrates this concept. Martin’s youngest son loves to put on his father’s glasses, which have quite strong prescription lenses. His son always marvels at the change in perspective and how different things look through his dad’s glasses. However, he cannot wear them too long, but happily reverts to his own visual reality.

Think about instances in your life when you put on somebody else’s “glasses” and received a view of how the world looked from another person’s perspective. Such instances are all about creating empathy or compassion for what others go through. Based on this son’s experience with his father’s glasses, how far can empathy really go? What are its limitations?

►STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: As we move beyond the initial chapters of Job into studying the various speeches in more detail, we see how, first,

Job and then his three friends develop discourse. With this overview in mind, it is important to understand that, while the first two chapters and the last chapter of the book are written in prose, the remaining chapters (*Job 3:3–42:6*) are composed in poetry. One of the main characteristics of Hebrew poetry is the parallelism that exists between the different poetic lines, as, for example, in *Job 8:3*: “Does God subvert judgment? Or does the Almighty pervert justice?” (*NKJV*).

Beyond that, the other important poetic device in *Job* is the rich imagery that is used throughout the book, powerfully illustrating the speeches; for example, the image of a hired worker and his hardships in *Job 7:1–6*, representing *Job*’s life of suffering, a life “without hope” (*Job 7:6*). It is important to mention these poetic devices in our class discussions in order to become aware of how they serve to enrich our understanding of Scripture.

Bible Commentary

The laments of *Job* echo a biblical anthropology that sheds light on his view of life and death. While they are just that—laments—and in that way focus on death and the negative, the laments also open the way for communication with God. If we direct even our most bitter laments to God, we are at the right place, and God entertains them.

I. Structure of the Book of *Job* (*Review Job 1–42 with the class.*)

At this point in our study of *Job* it might be interesting to look at the literary structure of the book as *Job* and his friends begin to enter into their respective discourses. The following is an outline that focuses on the most important parts of the book:

1. Prologue (*Job 1, 2*)—written in prose
2. *Job*’s first lament (*Job 3*)—from here onward until chapter 42:7, written in poetry
3. First cycle of dialogues: Eliphaz (*Job 4, 5*); *Job* (*Job 6, 7*); Bildad (*Job 8*); *Job* (*Job 9, 10*); Zophar (*Job 11*); *Job* (*Job 12–14*)
4. Second cycle of dialogues: Eliphaz (*Job 15*); *Job* (*Job 16, 17*); Bildad (*Job 18*); *Job* (*Job 19*); Zophar (*Job 20*); *Job* (*Job 21*)
5. Third cycle of dialogues: Eliphaz (*Job 22*); *Job* (*Job 23, 24*); Bildad (*Job 25*); *Job* (*Job 26, 27*)
6. *Job*’s monologue (*Job 28–31*)
7. Elihu’s speech (*Job 32–37*)
8. God’s response and *Job*’s repentance (*Job 38–42:6*)
9. Epilogue (*Job 42:7–17*)—written in prose

It is interesting to note that, following Job's initial lament in chapter 3, the first two cycles of dialogue are structured almost identically, with one friend speaking and with Job responding. The third cycle is shorter and leads to Job's extended monologue. Elihu's speech serves as an interval before God finally speaks. All of this creates a strong movement toward Yahweh's response, which serves as a literary climax to the book of Job. After His response, the epilogue (written, as the prologue is, in prose and not in poetry) concludes the book of Job, which is definitely a beautifully designed work of literary art.

Consider This: What other observations do you have when you look at the structure of the book of Job?

II. The State of the Dead *(Review Job 14 and John 11:11–14 with the class.)*

While Job most probably did not intend his narrative to serve as a primer on the biblical doctrine of the state of the dead, the statements throughout his discourses clearly show that he understood death as an unconscious sleep, a view indicated throughout the rest of the Bible. It is interesting to note that of the two books (Job and Genesis) that stand at the beginning of the writing of the Bible, the book of Job deals with the issues of suffering and death, issues that through the ages have been distorted to misrepresent the character of God and to lead people to believe in the immortality of the soul. Both issues point back to Satan's initial lie in Eden (*compare Gen. 3:1–5*). Job talks about human life as being fleeting (*Job 14:2*), contrasting human mortality with God's exclusive immortality (*1 Tim. 6:16*). Then he compares human death to a sleep (*Job 14:10–12; compare Ps. 13:3; Jer. 51:39, 57; Dan. 12:2*), during which there is no conscious state (*Eccles. 9:5, 6*).

As there is harmony in Scripture and continuity between the Old and New Testaments, this imagery of death as a sleep is taken up in the New Testament and applied in the most dramatic way by Jesus Himself to the death of His friend Lazarus (*John 11:11–14*). His disciples and apostles reiterate throughout their writings this understanding of death as a sleep (*Acts 7:60; 1 Cor. 15:51, 52; 1 Thess. 4:13–17; 2 Pet. 3:4*). Finally, the closing scenes of the book of Revelation refer to a time when there will be no more suffering and death (*Rev. 21:4*), following a resurrection to eternal life or to final destruction (*1 Cor. 15:26, Rev. 2:11, 20:14, 21:8*).

Consider This: Why is the belief in the immortality of the soul so prevalent among Christian churches? How does it affect our image of God?

III. State of the Living *(Review Job 7:17–21; 14:13–15; 19:25, 26; and John 3:16 with the class.)*

No biblical anthropology would be complete that looked solely at human

death. Indeed, the biblical metaphor of death as a sleep implies an awakening, which leads to the doctrine of the resurrection, which in turn, leads us to Jesus Christ. The big question of “What is man?” in Job 7:17 can be answered only by looking at the life, death, and resurrection of God’s Son, whose return to life serves as the guarantee for our victory over death (*John 5:28, 29*). Job already had a concept of this resurrection (*Job 19:25, 26*). The Father who sent His Son to die for our sins answers all questions of life and death once and forever (*John 3:16*).

Consider This: How have you struggled with the concept of theodicy? What has been your answer?

►STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: Every one of us has moments when depression has enveloped us and when our suffering becomes too much for us to bear. Job’s laments may help us to direct our sorrows to the right address.

Thought/Application Questions:

- ❶ Some Christians feel guilty about their depressive thoughts. Why might that be?
- ❷ How do you deal with the reality of negative thoughts and depression?

►STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: Depression is a very real issue within and without the church. It is important to address this problem from a Christian perspective.

Class/Individual Activities:

- ❶ Invite a guest speaker, maybe your pastor or a psychologist from your church, to present the topic of depression to your Sabbath School class. It would be good to include some practical strategies in the presentation on how to deal with depression.

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- ❷ Reach out to somebody who is going through a depression and share with this person your newly gained insights into the topic. Make sure that you pray with them.
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IT'S ALL ABOUT PEOPLE



An English-speaking Adventist church was founded 20 years ago in Vienna, Austria, by a few members with a vision of reaching foreigners. Today this young, mission-minded group has grown to nearly 200 and is in desperate need of a new place for worship.

A young Adventist group in Ragusa, Italy, faces a similar situation and is waiting for our help.

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Edited by NIKOLAUS SATELMAJER • JOHN MATHEWS

Giving is a volatile topic for most of us. But it is a biblical principle that needs more attention. For some, talking about faithful stewardship is like walking on thin ice. Reactions range from “All you want is my money!” to “Isn’t that trying to strike a bargain with God?” Where is the truth? Where is the blessing? Is there a balance?



One thing is certain—we either steward our possessions faithfully or allow them to become a spiritual barrier between us and God.

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