

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.

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?

Satan's Tempresses

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?

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 (*Ps. 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?

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?

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*[®], Apr. 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.

Witchcraft to Wonderful Savior

by ANTONIO SINABARE

I grew up in Mozambique, in a family that worshiped traditional gods and practiced witchcraft. I became sick and lost consciousness for hours at a time. My parents, with all their witchcraft, could not help me.

My sisters attended a Christian church. I noticed that when they sang Christian songs, I felt better. I began attending their church looking for healing. The pastor took me into his home to help me. When he saw the devil strings I wore, he told me to remove them. I obeyed, and from that day on I had no more fainting spells.

The pastor said I had the spirit of prophecy and healing, a gift from God that I could use to bless others. I prophesied and laid hands on people, who were healed. I was filled with pride that I was doing God's work. But I soon learned differently.

Controversy split my church, and my pastor and I formed another church. The pastor invited a teacher to teach us the Bible, hoping to increase our group's size and strength. The teacher taught things that I had never heard before. He showed us that when people die, they sleep until Jesus comes rather than go to heaven. When he showed us God's true Sabbath, our little group became divided. Eight church members, including my wife and me, began attending the Adventist church on Sabbath and our church on Sunday.

After my wife and I joined the Adventist church, I learned how to hold evangelistic meetings and give Bible studies. I began visiting neighbors and members of other churches, offering to study the Bible with them. I held a small evangelistic series, and six people followed Jesus and joined the Adventist church. Some leaders of other churches threatened us, but I could not stop sharing what I knew was God's truth with others.

We moved to an area that had no Adventist congregation, and we planted a church there. The more I taught others, the stronger my own faith grew. It was like a fire in my bones; I had to share my faith with others. In six years God has helped me plant two churches. The members are faithful, and the congregations continue to grow. One congregation now has 40 members.

I no longer feel pride in the powers I thought God had given me. I find joy in humbly teaching God's truth to others and training new believers to bring their friends to Jesus and teach them.

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