

The End



SABBATH—SEPTEMBER 24

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Job 42:10–17; Genesis 4:8; Matthew 14:10; 1 Corinthians 4:5; Daniel 2:44; Job 14:14, 15.

MEMORY VERSE: “Jesus said to her, ‘I am the One Who raises the dead and gives them life. Anyone who puts his trust in Me will live again, even if he dies’ ” (John 11:25, NLV).

IN WRITING CLASSES, students are taught how important a good ending is to a story. This point is especially true of stories that are fiction (made up). The fiction writer needs to bring the end of his or her story to a satisfactory close. But even in true stories, a good ending is important too.

But what about our own stories? These are the stories that are not in books or movies. But they are lived out in the flesh and blood of real life. What kind of endings do our own stories have? How do they come to a close? Are the loose ends tied together nicely, as they are in a good piece of writing?

Yet how could they end well when our stories always end in death? Because they end in death, we never really have happy endings. When is death happy?

The same is true with the story of Job. Its ending is often pictured as a happy ending. It is the opposite of all that Job had suffered in the beginning of the story. But it is really not that happy, because this story, too, ends in death.

This week, as we begin the book of Job, we will start at its end. We will start there because the end brings up questions about our ends as well, not just for now but for eternity.

HAPPILY EVER AFTER? (Job 42:10–17)

Oftentimes children’s stories end with the sentence, “And they lived happily ever after.” In some languages, it has been used so often that it has lost much of its power to move us and is no longer really effective. The whole idea is that whatever the story involves—a kidnapped princess, a bad wolf, an evil king—the hero and perhaps his new wife succeed in the end.

That is how the book of Job ends, or at least at first it seems that way. After all the troubles that Job suffers, the book ends on a rather positive note.

Read Job 42:10–17, the final verses of the entire book. What do they tell us about how Job ends his days?

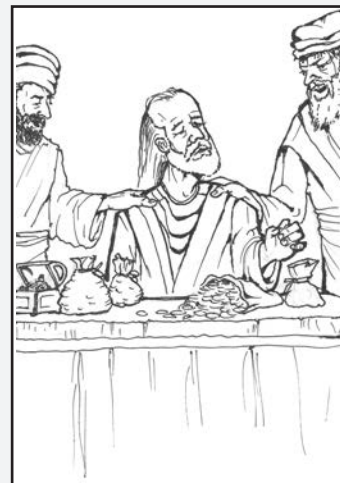
Suppose you were to ask someone about a book of the Bible that ended well for the main character, a book that had a “happily-ever-after” ending. No question, many would point to the book of Job.

After all, think about all that Job has as the story closes. Family and friends, who were not around while he suffered, come and comfort him. Of course, this group does not include Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar, Elihu, and Job’s wife, who were there from the beginning. But, in the end, the rest of his family and friends come and comfort him. They are kind, too, and they give him money.

As the story ends, Job has twice as much as he had at the beginning of the story (compare¹ Job 42:12 with Job 1:3). Job has ten more children—seven sons and three daughters. These children replace the seven sons and three daughters who died (read Job 1:2, 18, 19). And in all the land no women are “found so beautiful as the daughters of Job” (Job 42:15, NIV). Nothing is said about how beautiful his first ones were.

And this man, who had been so sure that death was right before him, lives on another 140 years. “So Job died, being old and full of days” (Job 42:17). The words “full of days” in Hebrew (sometimes translated “full of years”) are used to describe the last days of Abraham (Genesis 25:8), Isaac (Genesis 35:29), and David (1 Chronicles 29:28). It gives the idea of someone in a rather good and happy place at the time of a very unhappy event: death.

We all like stories with happy endings. What are some stories with happy endings that you know? What lessons can we take from them?



As the story ends, Job’s friends and family come to comfort him and to give him money.

DEFINITIONS

1. compare—to show how two or more things are the same or different.

UNHAPPY ENDINGS (Genesis 4:8)

The book of Job closes with things going well for Job, who dies “old and full of days.” As we all know, that is not how the story ends for so many others. Even those who are faithful and honorable and pure do not always end up in as good a situation as Job’s.

Determine how the stories end for each of the following Bible characters: Abel (Genesis 4:8); Uriah (2 Samuel 11:17); Eli (1 Samuel 4:18); King Josiah (2 Chronicles 35:22–24); John the Baptist (Matthew 14:10); and Stephen (Acts 7:59, 60).



The Bible is full of stories that do not have happy endings. That is because life itself is full of unhappy endings.

As these verses tell us, the Bible is full of stories that do not have happy endings. And that is because life itself is full of stories that do not have happy endings. In some cases, people are put to death for a cause they believe in or die from a horrible disease. Or their lives are full of pain and suffering. But many of these people do not come through their troubles as successfully as Job does. In fact, to be honest, how often do things work out as well for others as they do for Job? And we do not need the Bible to know this terrible fact. Who among us does not know of unhappy endings?

What are some stories with unhappy endings that you know? What have you learned from them?

THE (PARTIAL) RESTORATION² (1 Corinthians 4:5)

Yes, the story of Job ends on a positive note. But such an ending is not always true of the stories of the lives of people in the Bible and often of other people in general. Bible scholars sometimes talk about the “restoration” of Job. And it is true that many things were restored³ to him in some ways.

But if that were the complete end of the story, then, in all fairness, would the story really be complete? Certainly things get better for Job. But Job still dies in the end. And all his children die. And all his children’s children, and on and on, all die. No doubt, all of them suffered many of the same problems of life that we all do. These problems are facts of life in a fallen world.

And, as far as we know, Job never learns the reasons behind all the terrible events that happen to him. Yes, he has more children, but what about his sorrow and mourning for those whom he lost? What about the scars that, no doubt, he carried for the rest of his life? Job has a happy ending, but it is not a completely happy ending. Too many unanswered questions remain.

The Bible says that the Lord “made him [Job] successful again” (Job 42:10, NIV). God really does, especially when compared to all the terrible things that come before. But much still remains incomplete, unanswered, and unfulfilled.

This fact should not be surprising. After all, in this world as it is now, no matter what our “end” will be, whether good or bad, some things remain incomplete, unanswered, and unfulfilled.

That is why, in a way, the ending to the book of Job could be understood as a symbol of the true end of all human sadness and suffering. It foretells the hope and promise that we have, through the gospel of Jesus Christ, of a full restoration. In a way, this restoration will make Job’s seem like nothing in comparison.

Read 1 Corinthians 4:5. What does this verse tell us about how, in this life, some things will still remain unanswered, unfulfilled, and incomplete? To what hope does it point us instead?



Job’s ending foretells the hope and promise that we have, through the gospel of Jesus Christ, of a full restoration.

DEFINITIONS

2. restoration—the act or process of returning something to its original condition by repairing it or cleansing it.

3. restored—to give back someone or something that was lost or taken.

THE LAST KINGDOM (Daniel 2:44)



Death is not the end of our story.

Among other things, the Bible is a book of history. But it is not just a history book. It tells about events in the past and uses them (among other things) to teach us spiritual lessons. It uses events in the past to teach us truths about how we are to live in the here and now. (Read 1 Corinthians 10:11.)

But the Bible does not talk just about the past. It talks about the future too. It tells us not just about events that have happened but about events that will happen. It points us to the future, even to the end of time. The word for last-day events about end times is “eschatology.” It comes from a Greek word that means “last.” Sometimes it is used to show belief about death, judgment, heaven, and hell. It also deals with the promise of hope that we have of a new life in a new world.

And the Bible does tell us many things about the end times. Yes, the book of Job ends with Job’s death. If this were the only book one had to read, one could believe that Job’s story ended with death, period. There would be nothing else to hope for, because, as far as we can tell and from all that we know, nothing comes after.

But the Bible teaches us something else. It teaches that, at the end of time, God’s eternal kingdom will be set up, and it will continue forever. And it will be the eternal home of people who are saved. Unlike the worldly kingdoms that have come and gone, this one is everlasting.

Read Daniel 2:44 and Daniel 7:18. What hope do these verses point to about the end?

“The great plan of redemption brings back the world into God’s favor. All that was lost by sin is restored [made new]. Not only man but the earth is saved, to be the eternal home of the obedient. For six thousand years Satan has tried to gain control over the earth. But now God’s original purpose in its creation is done. ‘The saints of the Most High shall take the kingdom, and possess [have] the kingdom forever, even forever and ever.’ Daniel 7:18.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs [Forefathers and Leaders] and Prophets [Special Messengers]*, page 342.

Yes, the book of Job ends with his death. But the good news for us, and for Job, is that the end of the book of Job is not the end of Job’s story. And our death is not the end of ours either.

THE RESURRECTION⁴ AND THE LIFE (Job 14:14, 15)

Read Job 14:14, 15. What question is Job asking, and how, in his own way, does he answer it?

One of the themes the book of Job deals with is the question of death. How could it not? Any book that looks at human suffering would, of course, have to look at death. The reason is that death causes so much of our suffering. Job asks if the dead will live again, and then he says that he waits for his change (new life) to come. The Hebrew word for “wait” also suggests the idea of hope. It is not just waiting for something. Instead, it is *hoping* for it.

And what Job was hoping for was his “change.” This word comes from a Hebrew word that can give the idea of “renewal [new life]” or “replacement.” Often it means a change of clothing. The word itself is broad. But the meaning surrounding the word in the verse is the “renewal” that comes after death. Job hopes for this “renewal.” What else could this change be but a change from death to life? It is the time when God shall “long [wish] for the creature [created being] your [God’s] hands have made” (Job 14:15, NIV).

Of course, our great hope, the great promise that death will not be the end, comes to us from the life, death, and ministry (work done for God) of Jesus. “The [New Testament] teaches that Christ has defeated death, our most bitter enemy. It also teaches that God will raise the dead to a final judgment. But this teaching becomes an important part of Bible faith . . . after the resurrection of Christ. Christ’s victory over death makes it real and gives it power.”—Adapted from John E. Hartley, *The Book of Job*, NICOT, Accordance electronic edition (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1988), page 237.

“Jesus said to her [Martha], ‘I am the resurrection, and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even if he dies’ ” (John 11:25, NIV). What is Jesus telling us that gives us hope and faith about “the end”? What do we know that Job does not know?

DEFINITIONS

4. resurrection—return to life from the dead.

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: Many terrible events happen to Job. But he stays faithful to God. What is more, he is given back much of what he has lost. Still, with much of the book of Job, questions remain unanswered. Sure, Job is just one book of the Bible, and to base all our beliefs and teachings just on one book would be wrong. We have the rest of the Bible, which adds so much more understanding to many of the difficult questions discussed in the book of Job.

The New Testament brings to light many things that could not have been understood fully in Old Testament times. Perhaps the greatest example of this fuller understanding would be the meaning of the sanctuary service. A faithful Israelite might have understood the meaning of the death of the animals and of the entire system of sacrifices. But only through the example of Jesus and His death on the cross can we understand the meaning of the sanctuary more fully. The book of Hebrews helps make clear so much of the true meaning of the entire service.

Today we are blessed in knowing “present truth” (2 Peter 1:12) and certainly have more light on issues than Job had. But we still have to learn to live with unanswered questions too. The more truth we learn, the more truth God teaches us. We have great light, but there is still much more to learn. In fact, we have been told, “The saints will travel from world to world. And much of their time will be spent searching out the mysteries of redemption. And throughout eternity, this subject will be continually opening to their minds.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, March 9, 1886.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1 Progressive revelation means truth that keeps increasing or revealing (showing) newer and deeper truths to our minds. What are other examples of how the idea of progressive revelation works?
- 2 Read Job 42:11. Bible thinkers throughout history have asked the question, Where were Job’s relatives and friends during the times of his greatest need? They come *after* his situation improves and things get better for him. What is wrong with this picture?
- 3 How many bad endings do you know of now? What hope does the Cross give you that these bad endings do not truly end the story?