

Innocent¹ Blood



SABBATH—NOVEMBER 12

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Job 10; Isaiah 53:6; Romans 3:10–20; Job 15:14–16; Job 1:18–20; Matthew 6:34.

MEMORY VERSE: “Faith is being sure of what we hope for. It is being certain [sure] of what we do not see” (Hebrews 11:1, NlrV).

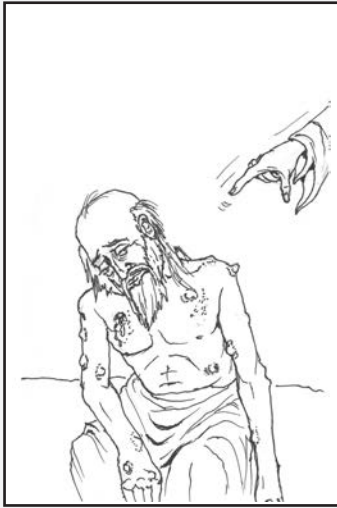
ALGERIAN-BORN WRITER ALBERT CAMUS struggled with the question of human suffering. In his book, *The Plague*,² he used a plague as a symbol (word-picture) for the ills that bring pain and suffering upon humans. He wrote a story about a little boy who dies a terrible death from a bad disease. Afterward a priest, who had been a witness to the child's awful death, said to a doctor who had been there too: “That sort of thing is disgusting because it passes our human understanding. But perhaps we should love what we cannot understand.” The doctor answered angrily, “No, Father. I have a very different idea of love. And until my dying day, I shall refuse to love a scheme [plan] of things in which children are put to torture.”—Adapted from Albert Camus, *The Plague* (New York: First Vintage International Edition, 1991), page 218.

This story shows what we have seen in Job: weak answers given by Job's friends to what is not a simple problem. Job knew, as did the doctor here, that the “weak” answers did not solve real problems. So that is the challenge: How do we find answers that make sense of what so often makes no sense? This week we will continue our search for answers.

DEFINITIONS

1. innocent—not guilty.
2. Plague—a disease that causes death and that spreads quickly to a large number of people. Also, a large number of harmful or annoying things.

JOB'S COMPLAINT (Job 10)



Job's friends tell him that he is suffering because of his sin. But the book of Job teaches the opposite: Job is suffering because he is faithful.

DEFINITIONS

3. Korah, Dathan, and Abiram—three men who rebelled against Moses. So God punished them by opening up the ground under their feet. See Numbers 16:1–40 for details.

4. universal—done or experienced by everyone.

Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar have a point: God does punish evil. But that point does not apply in Job's situation. Job's suffering is not caused by God's just (fair) punishment. God is not punishing Job for his sins, as He would do with Korah, Dathan, and Abiram.³ And Job is not reaping what he had sown. No, Job is a righteous (holy) man, and God Himself says so (read Job 1:8). So Job does not deserve what has happened to him, and he knows that he does not deserve it. That is what makes Job's complaints so hard and bitter.

Read Job 10. What is Job saying to God? And why does it make so much sense when you think about Job's situation?

In times of great suffering, have not those who believed in God asked the same questions? *Why, Lord, did You bother to create me at all? Or, Why are You doing this to me? Or, Would it not have been better if I had never been born than to have been created and faced this?*

Again, what makes it all the harder for Job to understand is that he knows that he has been faithful to God. He cries out to Him: " 'You already know I'm [I am] not guilty. No one can save me from your powerful hand' " (Job 10:7, NIV).

There is a difficult puzzle here: his friends may say differently, but Job is not suffering because of his sin. The book itself teaches the opposite: *Job is suffering here just because he is so faithful.* The first two chapters of the book make that point. Job has no way of knowing what the cause of his suffering is. And if he did, it probably would have made his bitterness and frustration worse.

Job's situation is rather special. But it is also universal⁴ in that it is dealing with the question of suffering, a suffering that seems so much greater than whatever evil someone might have done.

What can you say to someone who believes that he or she is suffering unfairly?

INNOCENT BLOOD? (1 Kings 8:46)

We often hear people talk about the question of “innocent” suffering. The Bible even uses the words “innocent blood” (Isaiah 59:7; Jeremiah 22:17; Joel 3:19). It uses the words in situations of a beating, or even murder, when someone does not deserve what happens to him or her. To understand the meaning of “innocent blood” is to understand that our world is filled with many examples of it.

But the Bible does talk about how real human sinfulness is. This brings up a good question about the meaning of “innocent.” If everyone has sinned, if everyone has broken God’s law, then who is truly innocent? As someone once said, “Your birth certificate is proof of your guilt.”

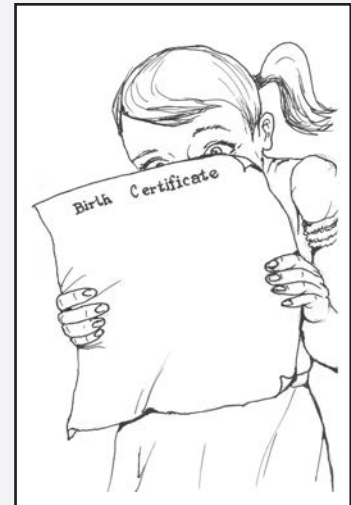
Bible thinkers for many hundreds of years have debated the exact nature of the human relationship to sin. But the Bible is clear that sin has touched the lives of all people on earth. The idea of human sinfulness is not found only in the New Testament. Instead, the New Testament just adds more to what was written in the Old Testament.

Read 1 Kings 8:46; Psalm 51:5; Proverbs 20:9; Isaiah 53:6; and Romans 3:10–20. What do these verses teach about how real sin is?

The Bible is very clear about the subject. But anyone who has ever known that the Lord is good and holy knows how real human sinfulness is. In that sense, who among us (not including the question of babies and young children for now) is truly “innocent”?

But that is not really the point. Job is a sinner. In that sense he is not innocent, any more than his own children are not innocent. And still, what had he done, or they done, to deserve the end that came upon them? Is this not the same question that all people ask about suffering? Job’s friends might argue about “defenses of clay” (Job 13:12, NKJV). But Job knows that what is happening to him is not something that he deserves.

How does the experience of knowing God and His holiness help us to understand our great need of the Cross? (This is true when we are aware of [know of] our sinfulness.)



Your birth certificate is proof of your guilt. We are all born sinners.

UNFAIR DEATHS (Job 15:14–16)

Read Job 15:14–16. What truth is Eliphaz giving to Job?

Again, Eliphaz is speaking truth (as are the others). This time he is speaking about the sinfulness of all people. Sin is an unchangeable fact of life on earth. So is suffering. And, as we also know, all human suffering comes from sin. And there is no question that God can use suffering to teach us important lessons. “God has always tried His people in the furnace of affliction [suffering]. It is in the heat of the furnace that the worthless and impure [not pure] material is separated from the true gold of the Christian character [thoughts; feelings; actions].” —Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs [Forefathers and Leaders] and Prophets [Special Messengers]*, page 129.

But there is a deeper problem with suffering. What about the times when no good comes from it? What about the suffering of those who do not have the worthless material separated from the gold in their character because they are killed quickly? What about those who suffer, never knowing the true God or anything about Him? What about those whose sufferings only made them bitter, angry, and hateful toward God? We cannot ignore these examples or try to come up with simple answers to such difficult issues. To do so would perhaps make us guilty of the same errors as Job’s friends when they blamed him for his suffering.

Also, what good comes from the end of animals in a forest fire who slowly are burned alive? Or what about the thousands of people killed in a natural disaster (earthquake; storm)? Or what about people killed in war? What possible lessons could they have learned, or their families, when their families were swept away with them?

What lesson might Job and his friends learn? What defeat will Satan face through Job’s faithfulness? The end of the lives of suffering people certainly does not seem fair. The fact is that these things are not fair. And they are not right.

We face many of the same challenges today. A six-year-old dies of cancer, and that is fair? A 20-year-old college girl is pulled from her car and raped. Is that fair? A 35-year-old mother of three is killed in a car accident. Is that fair? What about the 19,000 Japanese killed in the 2011 Tohoku earthquake? Were all 19,000 guilty of something that made their deaths a just (fair) punishment? If not, then their deaths were not fair either.

These are the hard questions.



“God has . . . tried His people in the furnace of affliction. It is in the heat of the furnace that the . . . impure material is separated from the true gold of Christian character.”

SUFFICIENT (ENOUGH) FOR THE DAY . . . (Genesis 4:8)

Read Job 1:18–20; Genesis 4:8; Exodus 12:29, 30; 2 Samuel 11:17; Jeremiah 38:6; Matthew 14:10; and Hebrews 11:35–38. Think about the quick deaths of those in the verses. Then ask yourself the question: How fair was life treating them?

The Bible shows a rough fact about life in our sinful world. The fact is that evil and suffering are real. A quick reading of the Word of God could give anyone the wrong idea that life here is fair and just and good. And it could also give the wrong idea, too, that if only we remain faithful to God, suffering will not come. Surely faithfulness can earn great rewards now. But that does not mean it blocks or stops suffering and pain. Just ask Job.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus gives a powerful sermon on why we need to trust God and not worry about what we will eat or drink or wear. And Jesus uses examples from nature as clear lessons on why we can trust in God's goodness to meet our needs. He then includes these famous words: " 'So don't [do not] worry about tomorrow. Tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough of its own' " (Matthew 6:34, NIV).

Notice, *sufficient (enough) unto the day is the evil thereof* (Matthew 6:34, KJV). Jesus is not denying the presence in our lives, even the *daily* presence, of evil (from a Greek word that can mean "badness"). If anything, He is doing the opposite. He is warning about the presence of evil in our daily lives. How could He not? As the Lord, He knew more about the evil in the world than any of us ever could, and all of us certainly know a lot about it already.

Who has not tasted a bit (or maybe a lot) of just how unfair and bitter life can be? How can paying attention to Jesus' warning about this evil in our daily lives help to give us comfort and strength?



Jesus uses examples from nature in His Sermon on the Mount as clear lessons on why we can trust in God's goodness to meet our needs.

THINGS NOT SEEN (Proverbs 3:5)

Read Proverbs 3:5. This proverb is such a common verse. But what important message does it have for us, especially as we think about what we have just been studying?

The case of Job seems to be an extreme (very severe and harsh) example of suffering. But it does show that human suffering is real and terrible in our sinful world. We do not need the story of Job or even the other stories we can read in the Bible to know how real it is. We find it all around us in our lives. In fact, we all live it.

“They [people] have only a few days to live. Their lives are full of trouble. They grow like flowers, and then they dry up. They are like shadows that quickly disappear” (Job 14:1, 2, NIV).

So again, the question we struggle with is, How do we explain suffering? This suffering is the kind that seems to make no sense to us, the kind in which innocent blood flows.

As the early chapters of Job have shown, and as the Bible elsewhere shows, Satan is real and is the cause of so much suffering. As we have seen early in this quarter (read lesson 2), the great controversy (war between Christ and Satan) theme works well in helping us deal with how real evil is in our world.

Still, it is hard to understand at times why the things that do take place happen. Sometimes things just do not make sense. It is at times like these, when things happen that we do not understand, that we need to learn to trust in the goodness of God. We need to learn to trust God even when answers are not very clear and when we cannot find anything good coming from the evil and suffering around us.

Hebrews 11:1 reads, “Faith is being sure of what we hope for. It is being certain [sure] of what we do not see” (NIV). From the things that we do see, how can we learn to trust God about the things that we do not see? From what we have read in the book of Job so far, what has Job learned to do? How can we learn to do the same?

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: Last Sabbath’s introduction began with Albert Camus, who wrote a lot about his struggle for answers. He struggled with the question of suffering and the question of life’s meaning in general. As with most atheists,⁵ he did not find good answers. His most famous quote shows how little he knew: “There is but one truly serious philosophical⁶ problem. That is suicide. Judging whether life is or is not worth living adds up to answering the fundamental [basic; very important] question of philosophy.”—Adapted from *The Myth⁷ of Sisyphus⁸ and Other Essays* (New York: Vintage Books, 1955), page 3. For sure, the question of human suffering is not an easy one to answer. The book of Job pulls back a veil and shows us a bigger picture than what we might have seen in other books. Even when we read it all, the book still leaves many questions unanswered.

But there is an important difference between those who struggle for answers to the question of suffering without God and those who do so with God. Yes, the problem of pain and suffering becomes more difficult when you believe that God is around. But we have what atheists such as Camus do not have: we have the knowledge of answers from the Bible. (There is proof that Camus later in life had wanted to be baptized, but he soon was killed in a car accident.) We have the hope that “He [God] will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or sadness. There will be no more crying or pain. Things are no longer the way they used to be” (Revelation 21:4, NIV). Even if someone did not believe this promise or many of the others in the Bible, that person would have to admit how much nicer life would be now to have at least that hope. He or she also would have to admit that having this hope would be much better than living here, with all its hard work and struggles, and then dying forever, with it all meaning nothing.

DISCUSSION QUESTION:

① One argument that people bring up about the question of evil is the idea that *Well, yes, there is evil in the world, but we have more of the good than the evil.* The first question that comes to mind in answer to that argument would be, *How does one know that the good outweighs the evil? How does one make that comparison?* The second question would be, *Even if true, what good would that idea do for Job (or others) in their suffering?* How would you respond to (answer) the idea that good somehow balances out the evil?

DEFINITIONS

5. atheists—persons who do not believe that God exists.

6. philosophical—of or relating to philosophy, which is the study of ideas about knowledge, truth, and the nature and meaning of life.

7. Myth—a story that was told in an ancient (very old) culture to explain a practice, belief, or natural occurrence.

8. Sisyphus—a legendary (imaginary) king of ancient (very old) Corinth who was punished by the Greek gods. His eternal punishment was to roll a heavy rock up a hill every day, only to have it roll down again as it nears the top.