

# **The Book of Job**

## **God and Human Suffering**

Lesson #4 for October 22, 2016

Scriptures: Romans 1:16-20; 3:1-4; Job 10:8-12; 12:7-10; Revelation 4:11; Colossians 1:16-17; Matthew 6:34.

1. Unlike every other book of the Bible, the book of Job is completely removed from the context of the land and people of Israel. From Genesis, with the promise to Abram that the Lord will “make of thee a great nation” (*Gen. 12:2*), to Revelation, which describes “the holy city,” Jerusalem (*Rev. 22:19*), in some way, directly or indirectly, the context of Israel and its covenant relationship with God helps shape each book.  
  
In Job there is nothing of that, not even the seminal event in ancient Israelite history, the Exodus. The most immediate reason is that Moses wrote Job in Midian, along with Genesis (see also *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p. 1140); the Exodus had not happened yet, which explains why it’s not mentioned.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for Sabbath, October 15.
2. Why do you suppose that is? It appears that Job had no relationship with the children of Israel. Did Moses meet Job or his family and learn about him while he was herding sheep in Midian? What do you think? How many people lived in the days of Abraham? Job? Or, Moses?
3. It is very difficult to date or locate the story of Job. While we do believe that Moses was the one who wrote it down, it is possible that the story was much older, going back even to the time of Abraham around 2000 B.C. or even earlier. The land of Uz mentioned as Job’s homeland in Job 1:1 apparently is also mentioned in Lamentations 4:21. The mining activities described in Job 28:1-11 seem to fit what we know about the area around ancient Edom in the southern portion of modern Jordan. The described life span of Job must have been at least 200 years. If he had 10 children who were adults before they were killed, he must have been at least 70 before the events recorded in the book of Job began. Job 42:16 says that he lived 140 years after that experience; so, he must have been over 200 years old when he died. Abraham lived to be 175 years. (*Genesis 25:7-8*) So, that seems fairly consistent with the age of Job.
4. There are those who believe that the story of Job is simply a literary wisdom composition and not a historical account. It is true that much of the book of Job was written in poetry, and it is highly literary. Other references in Scripture, including Ezekiel 14:14,20 and James 5:11, suggest that the Bible authors clearly believed that Job really existed. It is likely that the story of Job was told because his experience has universal applications.
5. In any case, it is very clear that the issues addressed in Job include human suffering and, even more importantly, the issue of theodicy—what kind of a Person is God? Can He be trusted? Or, not? We will talk much more about this later.
6. Read Romans 1:16-20. After his introduction in Romans 1, Paul set about to discuss the gospel. And the first thing that he discussed was God’s wrath! While we will not discuss God’s wrath in this lesson, it is still a part of theodicy which Paul apparently felt was the first question that needed to be addressed when discussing the gospel. So, when thinking about

the gospel, how often do we think immediately about God's reputation? Most people think the gospel is only about how God saves me—and you too, of course!

7. Paul went on to say that the natural world reveals sufficient information about God so that those who deny His existence or character have no excuse.
8. Every day, we learn new information about the marvels of life and the biology and physiology of all living creatures. Yet, many of those who are doing this complex research at least claim to believe that it all came about by chance. What an irony! We know that even the individual cell is so incredibly complex that it could not have happened by chance. Think of some of the electronic marvels that we deal with every day: computers, smart phones, electronic cameras, etc. Clearly, these things are very carefully designed. They look like they are designed; they work because the design has been tested and tested. Could it be that a human being who looks designed, acts purposefully, functions normally for scores of years is a product of pure chance? And we can reproduce ourselves! We cannot even clearly define what life is!
9. Read Job 12:7-10. Compare the words you have just read with those from Romans 1:16-20. Seeing the incredible complexity and beauty of the natural world teaches us about God and convinces us that this universe could not have happened merely by chance no matter how many years one might speculate that would take.
10. Theologians talk about *special revelation* and *general revelation*. What is the relationship between special revelation and general revelation? Do you understand the difference between the two? *General revelation* is a description of what we can learn about God from the world around us. And remember that every living thing has to be able to reproduce itself and that every detail of that pattern must be written into its DNA! *Special revelation* describes what we can learn from what God has revealed through His prophets.
11. If you have been exposed to theological discussions or even scientific discussions at one time or another, you have learned about some of the arguments in favor of and against God's existence. One of the most commonly discussed is the cosmological argument. That argument states that nothing can come from nothing. Basically, that is one of the principles of the laws of thermodynamics. So, if we start from where we are and go back and back and back, one eventually arrives at the point where there is nothing more that one knows of to which one can go back. Evolutionists take their arguments back to the Big Bang. But, who created the Big Bang? Some evolutionists may sarcastically respond when you ask them that question: "So, who created God?" Or, "Where did God come from?" How would you respond? You cannot believe in God and evolution at the same time. The Bible says that death came as a result of sin. But, evolution says that there were millions of years of lower creatures dying before man even came along!
12. Read Revelation 4:11; Colossians 1:16-17; John 1:1-3; and Hebrews 1:1-3. These verses and a number of others in Scripture make it very clear that the Bible teaches that God created everything. Genesis 1 suggests that it was a cooperative effort between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
13. Those who are aware of some of what is going on in the scientific world have probably heard of Stephen Hawking. He is considered to be one of the greatest scientists of modern times. On one occasion, he wrote:

Because there is a law like gravity the universe can and will create itself from nothing.—Stephen Hawking and Leonard Mlodinow, *The Grand Design* (New

York: Random House, 2010), p. 180. [As quoted in the *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for Monday, October 17, 2016, and as confirmed from source.]

Does that make sense? Does the first part of that sentence really indicate that the second part is true? So, where did the law of gravity come from?

14. Is it possible for rational human beings really to believe that the universe came into existence from “nothing”? Such an idea is foolishness, even when spoken by a great scientist. Read 1 Corinthians 3:19. Even in Paul’s day, it was clear to him that the wisdom of the wise was largely nonsense in the eyes of God.
15. Let us turn now to the specific question raised in this lesson: The problem of human suffering. If God is all-loving, all-good, and all-powerful, and if He created everything, how could evil exist? Was God the one who created evil? It is my personal belief that it is impossible to explain the existence of evil rationally without an understanding of the great controversy over God’s character and government. Love requires freedom and choice. When beings make wrong choices, evil is the result. But, why would any rational being reject love? To explain the existence of evil would be the equivalent of excusing it.

**It is impossible to explain the origin of sin so as to give a reason for its existence.** Yet enough may be understood concerning both the origin and the final disposition of sin to make fully manifest the justice and benevolence of God in all His dealings with evil. **Nothing is more plainly taught in [493] Scripture than that God was in no wise responsible for the entrance of sin; that there was no arbitrary withdrawal of divine grace, no deficiency in the divine government, that gave occasion for the uprising of rebellion. Sin is an intruder, for whose presence no reason can be given. It is mysterious, unaccountable; to excuse it is to defend it. Could excuse for it be found, or cause be shown for its existence, it would cease to be sin.** Our only definition of sin is that given in the word of God; it is “the transgression of the law;” it is the outworking of a principle at war with the great law of love which is the foundation of the divine government.—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* 492.2-493.0. [Bold type is added.]

16. Where did the book of Job and the story of Job come from? Do we know who wrote the book? See Item #1 through #4 above.

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 Comments, *The Signs of the Times*, February 19, 1880, par. 14; *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, 1140.3. Compare *Patriarchs and Prophets* 251.1.

Most commentators agree that it is difficult to pinpoint the time and place that the book of Job [took place or] was written. Ellen G. White mentions that Moses wrote the book of Job during his sojourn in Midian, sometime between 1490 and 1450 B.C., before the exodus from Egypt took place. Rabbinic tradition in the Talmud also suggests Moses as the author (*Tractate Baba Bathra 14b*).—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* 54. [Content

in brackets is added.]

17. *Baba Bathra* IV.11 A. Who wrote them? [Section describing who the authors were.]

**B. Moses wrote his own book and part of Balaam and Job.**—Neusner, J. (2011). *The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary* (Vol. 15, 55). Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers. [Bold type and content in brackets are added.]

18. Job was one of the first two books of the Bible to be written. It was not until around the days of Moses that an alphabetic form of writing was invented.

19. Why did God ask Moses to write the book of Job at the beginning of the writing of inspired Scripture? Did God know up front that there would be questions about His character, His government, and the problem of evil? The great controversy or cosmic conflict is brought out in the first chapters of Genesis and in the first chapters of Job.

20. Read Matthew 6:34; John 16:33; Daniel 12:1; and Matthew 24:7. What can we learn from these passages? Evil and trouble are coming the likes of which the world has never known. God will gradually withdraw His protection from the world and will let Satan have more and more control. The universe will see what it would be like if Satan were given the authority to rule over everything. Does it seem to you that things are getting better and better in our world? Or, are they getting worse and worse?

21. Did Job ever question the existence of God? If not, why not? Instead, Job's question was what kind of a Person is God? Why did He allow evil to exist? Have you ever had similar questions raised in your own mind? (Job 6:4-8; 9:1-12)

22. If you were to ask an atheist or an evolutionist to explain why there is evil in the world, what answer might you get? If you believe that we are the result of pure chance, then the response might be: That is what happens when there is survival-of-the-fittest or perhaps better stated, survival-of-those-who-survive! If there is no explanation for origins and, thus, no rational reason for our being here, then all our lives are just meaningless.

23. Read Job 10:8-12. Job said that if God went to all the trouble of carefully making each of us organ by organ, why would He want to destroy what He had made?

24. If we lived in a world that was mechanically controlled by cause-and-effect, then evil should only happen to people who are sinners or who bring the evil upon themselves. But, we see that—as in the case of Job—bad things happen even to good people who are nonetheless sinners. Is all of that just pure chance? Or, are we seeing demonstrated the fact that sin has terrible consequences not only for the sinner directly himself but also for others around him. (Deuteronomy 29:19) We live in a sinful and dangerous world.

25. Read Romans 3:1-4. Paul was reaching the climax of his initial arguments in the book of Romans. And the question was: "Can God be trusted?" What will each of us say about Him in the day when He is judged? Unbelievable as it may seem, in the setting of the great controversy, God invites each of us as His creatures to vote, either for Him or for the Devil.

**Romans 3:4:** Certainly not! God must be true, even though every human being is a liar. As the scripture says,

"You must be shown to be right when you speak;

you must win your case when you are being tried."—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation* (2nd ed., Romans 3:4). New York: American Bible Society.

26. We have talked already much about the great controversy. In a sense, the great controversy is really a kind of theodicy. If God exists, what kind of a Person is He? Can He be trusted? Is He responsible for the evil that exists in our world?

Every question of truth and error in the long-standing controversy has now been made plain. The results of rebellion, the fruits of setting aside the divine statutes, have been laid open to the view of all created intelligences. The working out of Satan's rule in contrast with the government of God has been presented to the whole universe. Satan's own works have condemned him. God's wisdom, His justice, and His goodness stand fully vindicated. **It is seen that all His dealings in the great controversy have been conducted [671] with respect to the eternal good of His people and the good of all the worlds that He has created.** "All Thy works shall praise Thee, O Lord; and Thy saints shall bless Thee." Psalm 145:10. **The history of sin will stand to all eternity as a witness that with the existence of God's law is bound up the happiness of all the beings He has created. With all the facts of the great controversy in view, the whole universe, both loyal and rebellious, with one accord declare: "Just and true are Thy ways, Thou King of saints."** [Revelation 15:3]—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* 670.3-671.0. [Bold type and content in brackets are added.]

27. Do you believe that when the whole great controversy is over, we will be able to look back at the events and praise God for what He has done? Incredible as it may seem, the angels in heaven will be rejoicing even in the midst of the seven last plagues! (Revelation 15:3) They will not be rejoicing because of the plagues but rather because they can see that evil is coming to an end. Do we really believe that everything God does and what He asks of us is for our best good—as He claims? If so, shouldn't we thank Him now even in our ignorance of why some things are happening?

28. C. S. Lewis wrote a book after his wife died in which he stated:

Not that I am (I think) in much danger of ceasing to believe in God. The real danger is of coming to believe such dreadful things about Him. The conclusion I dread is not 'So there's no God after all,' but 'So this is what God's really like. Deceive yourself no longer.'—*A Grief Observed* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1996), pp. 6,7. [As quoted in the *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for Friday, October 21, 2016, and confirmed from the original source book.]

Try to imagine a conversation between two well-known British gentlemen: C. S. Lewis and Stephen Hawking! How do you think it would go?

29. What are the most important things God has done to teach us about His character? What do we learn about Him from the life, ministry, and death of Jesus Christ?
30. If you had the opportunity to talk to an atheist or an evolutionist, what would you say to her/him to convince her/him that life is not just meaningless? Could you show convincing evidence that there is life beyond this life? What evidence could we provide that God can be trusted and that He interacts with human beings on a regular basis? Isaiah 40-55 is a very interesting section. In it, Isaiah argued that there are two main things that distinguish the real God from all others: 1) His ability to create, and 2) His ability to predict the future far in advance! There is no possible evolutionary explanation for #2!
31. What have you learned about God from nature? Are there limitations to what we can learn

about God from nature? The beauty of the flower and the fact that many of them have a wonderful aroma tells us about God's love. The balance that we see in all of nature speaks volumes about God. While we may not have all the best explanations for why things are happening, we know that after the third coming of Christ, even Satan will bow on his knees and admit that God has been right all along and everything that God has done has been for the best good of the universe. (Philippians 2:10-11)

32. We know that there has been suffering since the days of Adam and Eve, starting especially when Cain killed his brother Abel, extending all the way down to our day. And we have scriptural evidence that things will only get worse. Have you worked things out well enough so that you are comfortable with that progression and you understand why it is happening? Or, are you still throwing secret accusations in God's direction?

33. The *Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* page 53 mentions this incident from a friend's life.

"The trunk lid fell with cruel finality. I could still see the light-colored pine coffin through the rear window, but then the undertaker started the engine and drove off. Gone. My child is gone! My glasses misted up from the tears. It hurt so much—as if I had been cut in half. Even though I had known for months that this moment would eventually come, even though I had nodded when the undertaker asked, 'May I close the coffin now?', even though my mind had long ago agreed when Andrea prayed, 'Lord, let me die, I cannot fight anymore,' even though I was relieved that she no longer needed to suffer pain and never again had to fear another test result—my heart cried, 'No! It's so unfair! She is still so young! I wish I could have died in her place!' Andrea had been only 25 years old when her struggle with cancer ended."

34. We all know that this story is not unique. Any of us who have lived in our world long enough have been touched by suffering and even death in one way or another.

35. Have you ever felt that you were experiencing what Job talked about in Job 6:4-10? David was happy to have God fighting on his behalf as recorded in Psalm 18:29-42. But, Job seemed to think that God was fighting against him, hitting him with His poison arrows!

36. Since we believe that we will one day live in a perfect world where there will be no pain, no death, and no suffering, why do we have to go through a time of trouble before we get there?

37. In conclusion, let us once again state emphatically that Satan's attack on Job was really an attack on God's character and His ability to judge correctly. That is the basic issue in the great controversy.

38. As we will discover, God Himself spoke out at the end of the book—in Job 38-41. Did God's speech in those chapters help to answer the questions we have raised in this lesson? The *Bible Study Guide* suggests that the purpose of this book was to vindicate Job. But, was it Job who needed to be vindicated? Or, did Job, by remaining faithful to God, help to vindicate God? Even in this lesson, it is to be noted that almost all of the questions were really about God. As we will see as we go along, the book is primarily about God. So, what will your vote be? Will you vote for God? Or, for the Devil? Are the issues clear to you?

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