

# ***The Book of Job***

## ***Retributive Punishment***

Lesson #7 for November 12, 2016

Scriptures: Job 8:1-22; 11:1-20; Isaiah 40:12-14; Genesis 6:5-8; 2 Peter 3:5-7.

1. There are many things that have happened to our world that are impossible to explain logically without an understanding of the great controversy over God's character and government. People have tried again and again to explain the causes of evil with little success. A famous book which came out recently was entitled, "*Why Do Bad Things Happen to Good People?*" It is just one example. The book of Job gives us an opportunity to look at that question. Much of the book of Job is focused on human suffering. But, is human suffering really the theme of the book of Job? What is God's perspective on human suffering? How much of what is said in this book is actually the Devil's perspective, showing what our lives would be like if he were in control?
2. Read Job 8:1-22. As if Eliphaz's speech was not bad enough, Bildad and Zophar made it even worse—as we will see in this lesson. Bildad was certain that Job had done something really evil and, thus, that God would throw him onto the dung heap after he died and that no one would remember him for more than a short time!

**Job 8:4 (GNB):** "Your children must have sinned against God, and so he punished them as they deserved."

3. Would Bildad or Zophar have dared to make such a statement if they had known about Job 1&2? I hope they came back to Job and commended him for carefully following God's will when he was prosperous again as in Job 42! They just assumed the worst about Job.
4. These accusers of Job made a number of statements about God's sovereignty that are correct. Satan always mixes truth with error. So, how can we distinguish what is truth and what is error? Bildad wanted us to believe that God always punishes evil and always rewards righteousness. Is that why Job's children were destroyed? Bildad went on to say: "And when the wicked are punished, they will not long be remembered!" (Job 8:18)
5. What is *retributive punishment*? "Retribution: *n* 1 the act of punishing or taking vengeance for wrongdoing, sin, or injury. 2 punishment or vengeance."—(2000). *Collins English Dictionary* (Fourth Edition Updated). Glasgow: HarperCollins Publishers. Does God ever do that? Does He do it in anger? When God "destroys a nation" like the northern kingdom of Israel, what does the Bible say about it?
6. **Hosea 4:17:** The people of Israel are under the spell of idols. Let them go their own way.—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation* (2nd ed., Hosea 4:17). New York: American Bible Society.
7. How does God feel about letting His children go? Does He have to let us go if we keep on sinning? If so, why?
8. **Hosea 11:7-9 (GNB):** [The LORD said:]<sup>7</sup> "They insist on turning away from me. They will cry out because of the yoke that is on them, but no one will lift it from them.

<sup>8</sup> "How can I give you up, Israel?

How can I abandon you?

Could I ever destroy you as I did Admah,

or treat you as I did Zeboiim?

My heart will not let me do it!

My love for you is too strong.

<sup>9</sup> I will not punish you in my anger;

I will not destroy Israel again.

For I am God and not a human being.

I, the Holy One, am with you.

I will not come to you in anger. [Content in brackets is added.]

9. Our lives on this earth are very short relative to eternity. Many others, in addition to Bildad, have pointed that out. (James 4:14)
10. When dealing with sin, how can we balance justice, law, and obedience with forgiveness, grace, and substitution? Are these “ditches” on each side of the truth? If we are to follow the example of Jesus, we should always err on the side of grace and forgiveness.
11. Read Job 11:7-9 and Isaiah 40:12-14. What was Zophar trying to say to us in these verses? The Bible writers did not question God’s sovereignty. They recognized that He is all-powerful. Does that fact justify the words of these critics of Job? We certainly must recognize that no matter how hard we search in this life and even in the future life, we will never be able to fully and completely comprehend God.
12. Can you clearly point out what was right and what was wrong with Zophar’s speech? Was Job being punished less than he deserved? (Job 11:6-7) Can you even imagine someone who claimed to be a child of God making such an accusation against someone who was suffering so terribly?
13. As Seventh-day Adventists, we have more evidence about the character of God than any other group that has ever lived. Does that make us the best representatives of God who have ever lived? How did Christ respond when He was accused by others? How did He respond to sin in the city of Jerusalem?

Christ Himself did not suppress one word of truth, but He spoke it always in love. **He exercised the greatest tact, and thoughtful, kind attention in His intercourse with the people. He was never rude, never needlessly spoke a severe word, never gave needless pain to a sensitive soul. He did not censure human weakness. He fearlessly denounced hypocrisy, unbelief, and iniquity, but tears were in His voice as He uttered His scathing rebukes. He wept over Jerusalem, the city He loved, that refused to receive Him, the Way, the Truth, and the Life.** They rejected Him, the Saviour, but He regarded them with pitying tenderness, and sorrow so deep that it broke His heart. Every soul was precious in His eyes. While He always bore Himself with divine dignity, He bowed with tenderest regard to every member of the family of God. In all men He saw fallen souls whom it was His mission to save.—Ellen White, *The Desire of Ages* 353.1; *GW92* 391.3; *SC* 12.1; compare *RH*, December 16, 1884, par. 17. [Bold type is added.]

Do you think these words about Jesus would apply to the speeches of Job’s three friends?

14. In light of what you know about the book of Job, do you think that Job’s three friends were

true worshipers of the true God? Remember that in their day, there was no Bible, no pastors, no prophets that we know about! Of course, we do not know at what point in history these men actually lived. Surely, it must have been after the flood. Is it possible that it was after the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah? Do you think Job's three friends took the flood and perhaps the story of Sodom and Gomorrah as proof for their thinking that God destroys wicked people?

15. Read Genesis 6:8. Notice these words from Ellen White about the building of the ark:

Every [hammer] blow struck upon the ark was preaching to the people.—*The Spirit of Prophecy, vol. 1, 70.1; 3SG 65.1 (1864); SR 63.2; compare PP 95.1; ST, February 27, 1879, par. 11.* [Content in brackets is added.]

16. So, we must ask a question in light of the rest of Scriptures: Does God punish sinners in a form of retributive judgment? Read Genesis 13:13; 18:20-33; and 19:24-26. What was God's role in the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah? Do not forget Matthew 10:15 and 11:23-24. Was Jesus's second hometown really more wicked than Sodom and Gomorrah?
17. If we are going to take the Scriptures as they read, we must admit that God put to death many people as recorded in the Old Testament. However, all of those deaths were the first death. Remember that from God's point of view, the first death is nothing more than an extended sleep. Think of the people killed by God in the flood; Sodom and Gomorrah; the firstborn in Egypt; Nadab and Abihu; Korah, Dathan, and Abiram; Uzzah; the 185,000 Assyrians; etc. We must remember that God will resurrect every one of them either at the second coming or at the third coming. (John 5:28-29) Ultimately, could some of those people be saved?
18. So, why did God put all those people to sleep in the first death? Were there some young children destroyed in the flood or perhaps among the firstborn in Egypt who were not ardent sinners? Does every evil deed need to be punished? Is divine retribution essential to your understanding of the gospel? Why? Or, why not? What about people who believe in an eternally-burning hell?
19. Read Deuteronomy 6:24-25 and 1 Samuel 12:15. There are also many other passages including whole sections in Deuteronomy suggesting that if you are good, God will reward you; but, if you are evil, God will punish you.
20. Read Numbers 16:1-33. Is it possible to explain the deaths of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram in any way except as a punishment by God? Their punishment is described as God "creating" a new thing! Did God destroy those men and their families—notice, however, that Korah's family were not destroyed (Numbers 26:11)—because He was angry? Or, because He needed to teach an important lesson? So, why were Achan's children killed?
21. Read Revelation 20:14 and 1 Corinthians 15:26. Compare 2 Peter 3:5-7. Consider also these words from Ellen White:

Fire comes down from God out of heaven. The earth is broken up. The weapons concealed in its depths are drawn forth. Devouring flames burst from every yawning chasm. The very rocks are on fire. The day has come that shall burn as an oven. The elements melt with fervent heat, the earth also, and the works that are therein are burned up. Malachi 4:1; 2 Peter 3:10. The earth's surface seems one molten mass—a vast, seething lake of fire. It is the time of the judgment and perdition of ungodly men—"the day of the Lord's vengeance, and the year of recompenses for the controversy of Zion."

Isaiah 34:8.—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* 672.2.

But, we must not forget Isaiah 66:23-24 (*GNB*):

<sup>23</sup> “On every New Moon Festival and every Sabbath, people of every nation will come to worship me here in Jerusalem,” says the LORD. <sup>24</sup> “As they leave, they will see **the dead bodies** of those who have rebelled against me. The worms that eat them will never die, and the fire that burns them will never be put out. The sight of them will be disgusting to the whole human race.” [Bold type is added.]

22. If the fire that cleans up the world is so hot that it melts the elements, it would instantly consume human beings, whether alive or dead! When God destroys the wicked at the end, will He be using a blow torch to torture them? How do we explain Isaiah 66:23-24, suggesting that what is burned up will be dead bodies? While it is true that all suffering has come as a result of sin, it is not true that all suffering is a punishment from God. It certainly was not the case with Job unless you say that God was responsible because He allowed that suffering. To what degree does suffering in our world represent that fact?
23. Is it possible to distinguish between a punishment that God sends as a form of retribution and calamity which God allows? Can we be sure that we have judged correctly?
24. Once again, we should remember that the best way to understand biblical stories is to put one's self back in that situation, as far as possible. Could you possibly feel like Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar did if you were watching Job apparently dying?

It is very natural for human beings to think that great calamities are a sure index of great crimes and enormous sins; but men often make a mistake in thus measuring character. **We are not living in the time of retributive judgment. Good and evil are mingled, and calamities come upon all. Sometimes men do pass the boundary line beyond God's protecting care, and then Satan exercises his power upon them, and God does not interpose.** Job was sorely afflicted, and his friends sought to make him acknowledge that his suffering was the result of sin, and cause him to feel under condemnation. They represented his case as that of a great sinner; but the Lord rebuked them for their judgment of His faithful servant.—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, 1140.5. [Bold type is added.]

25. There are many cases in which it seems like someone suffers or even dies as a direct result of his/her own behavior. We think of smokers who die of lung cancer or heart disease. We think of drunks who kill themselves in automobile accidents, etc. But, there are a lot of times when we do not know exactly why things happen. And there are many apparently good people—as in the case of Job—who suffer terribly. There are even good people who have never smoked but who get lung cancer!
26. So, how should we regard the retributive judgments of God? Are we correct if we think that God is acting out of anger? That certainly does not seem to be the case in light of Hosea 11:7-9. And even if someone is suffering terribly and even if it is his/her own fault, is it right for us to stand and condemn him/her?
27. So, what will happen in the final day of judgment at the third coming of Christ? Is God going to destroy all the wicked in some form of retributive punishment?
28. Read Philippians 2:10-11 (*GNB*):

And so, in honor of the name of Jesus  
all beings in heaven, on earth, and in the world below  
will fall on their knees,  
and all will openly proclaim that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
to the glory of God the Father.

How does this fit? Does that include Satan? What would cause Satan to bow on his knees and admit that God is right in everything He has done? There must be some very compelling evidence presented. See *The Great Controversy* pages 666-668. There will be a panorama showing the full story of sin and rebellion and God's response; it will be so compelling that even Satan will have to admit the truth as he falls down on his knees.

29. Where do you think Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar got their understanding of God? Remember that, as we have already noted, in their day there was no Bible, there were no pastors, and no prophets. Did they get their understanding from their parents? If they knew about the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, did they think that perhaps Job was as wicked as those people? Did Job's friends make any attempt to ask Job's neighbors what Job or even his children had done to deserve what happened?
30. If you have not done so yet, read again Job 8:1-22 and 11:1-20 where the speeches of Bildad and Zophar are recorded.

Bildad's speech, as recorded in Job 8:1-20, responds to Job's passionate plea in defense of his innocence, in chapters 6 and 7. He delivers his response in a calm and analytical way. Nevertheless, it contains almost scathing words, dismissing Job's words as "blustering wind" (*Job 8:2, NIV*). For Bildad, there is no doubt that God (a) always punishes the wicked (*Job 8:13*) and (b) always prospers the righteous (*Job 8:20*). In order to support his argument he draws on logic (*Job 8:3-7*) and tradition (*Job 8:8-10*) and analogies from nature (*Job 9:5-9*). As a side note: his imagery of the papyrus plant that wilts without moisture is interesting (*Job 8:11, 12*), given that Moses, who wrote the book of Job, was very familiar with this plant, which grew profusely in the Nile delta in Egypt from whence he fled. Bildad's logic and acid analysis desensitized him to the suffering of Job, reducing God to a mechanical executioner of His own justice.—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* 95.

31. Zophar went even beyond Bildad, suggesting that God was punishing Job even less than he deserved!

**Job 11:5-6 (GNB):** <sup>5</sup> How I wish God would answer you!

<sup>6</sup> He would tell you there are many sides to wisdom;

there are things too deep for human knowledge.

God is punishing you less than you deserve.

32. Job's three friends must have felt very strongly about their opinions. Somehow, they were convinced that it was their responsibility to defend God! Does God need our feeble attempts to defend Him? How often do we do it correctly? Think how proudly God spoke about Enoch, Joseph, Abraham, Moses, and Job.
33. Read Mark 15:3-5. How did Jesus respond when accused by the Pharisees, the

Sadducees, and even Pilate? He said nothing. But don't forget His words in John 8!

34. Is it ever our responsibility to defend God's reputation? **If we are truly God's friends, shouldn't we try to defend Him whenever we have an opportunity?** Can we find good reasons why God has put to death some people, especially in the Old Testament?
35. Review Exodus 15:7; 22:22; 32:10; Numbers 16; Revelation 18:8; and 19:15. How do you feel about these verses? There are some who try to explain these deaths, suggesting that there was some impersonal, inevitable consequence of sin. Is there some law that forces even God to punish evil?

This model begs a set of questions: Who alone could have established such an impersonal, universal law of punishment, if not God Himself? And more important: What about the consistently active descriptions of God's wrath in the Bible that He personally enacts upon the punished? Within the great controversy, sin has originated on a personal level with Satan. The end of sin—whether it be through the direct punishments in the Bible that foreshadow the final judgment or the final resolution of sin at the end of time—is also brought about by a personal being, a God who is actively involved in the work of salvation. And lest we forget: God's judgment always is inextricably connected to His mercy.—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* 97.

36. For those who would like to look at this question in more depth, go to [www.theox.org](http://www.theox.org) and look at the lengthy handout entitled *The Final End of Sin and Sinners*.

[https://www.theox.org/images/images\\_A2115/KHART-EGW-PDF\\_SIN\\_&\\_SINNERS-FINAL\\_END.pdf](https://www.theox.org/images/images_A2115/KHART-EGW-PDF_SIN_&_SINNERS-FINAL_END.pdf)

37. So, how do you feel about God's destroying Satan and all sinners at the end? If God were actively punishing evil, wouldn't he have destroyed Satan first? But, Satan is the last sinner to die!

**Some are destroyed as in a moment, while others suffer many days. All are punished "according to their deeds."** The sins of the righteous having been transferred to Satan, he is made to suffer not only for his own rebellion, but for all the sins which he has caused God's people to commit. His punishment is to be far greater than that of those whom he has deceived. After all have perished who fell by his deceptions, he is still to live and suffer on. In the cleansing flames the wicked are at last destroyed, root and branch—Satan the root, his followers the branches. The full penalty of the law has been visited; the demands of justice have been met; and heaven and earth, beholding, declare the righteousness of Jehovah.—Ellen White, *The Great Controversy* 673.1. [Bold type is added.]

38. Can you put all these pieces together? Can we do so in a way that supports our belief in a God who is love?

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