

Is There Not a Good Reason for the Curse?



SABBATH—OCTOBER 29

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Psalm 119:65–72; Job 2:11–13; Job 4:1–21; Romans 3:19, 20; 1 Corinthians 3:19; Hebrews 12:5; Matthew 7:1, 2.

MEMORY VERSE: “ ‘ “Can a human being [person] be more right than God? Can a mere man be more pure than the One who made him?” ’ ” (Job 4:17, NlrV).

LAST WEEK WE DISCUSSED THE IMPORTANCE of putting ourselves in the position of Job as much as we possibly could. It should not have been that hard. Why? Because we have all been there. We have all found ourselves involved in suffering that so often seems to make no sense. And certainly it does not seem fair.

As we study this week's lesson, we should keep these facts in mind. But we also need to understand the thinking of the other people in the story. They are the men who come to mourn and grieve with Job.

And understanding these men should not be so hard either. Who among us has not seen the suffering of others? Who has not tried to comfort others in their pain and loss? Who does not know what it is like to search for the right words to speak to those whose grief cuts at our own hearts too?

In fact, much of the book of Job really is taken up with the conversation between Job and these men. Each of them tries to make sense of what so often seems to make no sense. It is the endless series of human suffering and tragedy in a world created by a loving, powerful, and caring God.

THE BIG QUESTIONS (Psalm 119:65–72)



There is nothing like a terrible event to shake us out of our spiritual “sleep” and to start us asking the important questions.

DEFINITIONS

1. theology—the study of religious faith, practice, and experience; the study of God and God’s relation to the world.

2. philosophy—the study of ideas about knowledge, truth, and the nature and meaning of life.

Most of the action in the book of Job takes place in the first two chapters. Here the “veil” between heaven and earth is lifted. And we are given a quick look at a part of real life that would at any other time remain hidden from us. Our telescopes can “see” far into outer space. But they have not yet shown us what we have been shown in this book. This book was written thousands of years ago in a desert near what is Saudi Arabia today, long before there were telescopes. Yet in its pages we discover what no telescope could ever show us: just how closely connected God’s heaven is with our world.

After the first two chapters, the book of Job includes a lot of talking. Much of it is done by Job and the men who come to discuss the heavy issues of life: theology,¹ pain, philosophy,² faith, life, and death.

And why not? Why would these men not discuss the big issues of life when you think about all that has happened to Job? It is so easy to talk about the common things of life and the business of just living day by day and to forget what the big and important questions are. There is nothing like a terrible event (in our lives or in the lives of others) to shake us out of our spiritual “sleep” and to start us asking the important questions.

Read Psalm 119:65–72. What is the writer of the psalm saying?

The psalmist was able to find the good that arose from the terrible events that he experienced. At times, troubles can be “hidden” blessings. They can either lead us back to the Lord or bring us to Him in the first place. Who has not heard stories of those whose lives were in serious trouble? How often did the person either come back to God or surrender to God for the first time? Sometimes troubles, no matter how terrible or sad, can be used for a good that we can understand later. Other times they appear meaningless.

How have you been able to think back on past suffering and find the good that has come out of it? How do you deal with those troubles that have brought nothing good?

WHEN HAVE THE INNOCENT DIED? (Job 2:11–13)

Read Job 2:11–13. What do Job’s friends think about his situation?

Job’s friends hear about what happens to him. So they make “an appointment” (Job 2:11, NKJV) to come together to visit their friend. The verses suggest the idea that they are shocked at what they find. And they begin to mourn with him.

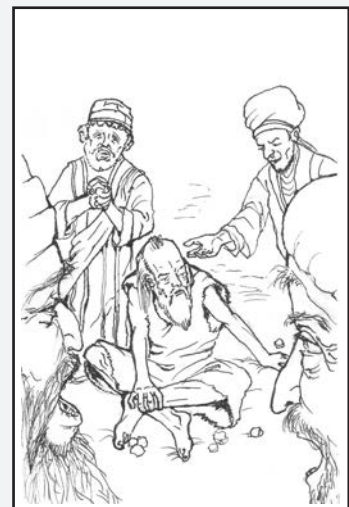
According to the verses, they sit silently for seven days, never saying a word. After all, what do you say to someone in a position as terrible as Job’s? Job speaks after the seven days of silence, making his complaints. Then these men have plenty to say.

Read Job 4:1–11. What is the main idea of Eliphaz’s words to Job?

Perhaps a good opening for a book on grief counseling could begin with a chapter on Eliphaz. The chapter could be titled, “What Not to Say to a Grieving Soul.” Clearly these men sympathize with Job. But that sympathy is rather limited. It seems that for Eliphaz the right beliefs are more important than sympathy. Suppose someone comes up to a person who has gone through the kind of terrible hardship and suffering that Job had. And he says to the person who suffered, *Well, you must have deserved it, because God is just, and only the wicked suffer like this.* Imagine how you would feel if you were that person!

Suppose, again, one thought that Job really did deserve to suffer. Then what good does it do to say something so hurtful to one who is suffering at such a difficult time? Suppose a speeding driver got into a car accident and lost all of his family in the crash. Can you imagine someone going up to him, amid his grief, and saying to him right away, “*God is punishing you for your speeding*”? The problem with Eliphaz’s words is not only about his religion. The bigger issue is how insensitive he is to Job and all that he is going through.

Think about a time people comforted you for your loss and pain. What did they say? How did they say it? What did you learn from that experience that could help you when you are in the position of comforting someone else?



Job’s friends are shocked to see their friend.

A MAN AND HIS MAKER (Job 4:12–21)



We as humans are short-lived and can be crushed as easily as a moth.

Eliphaz would not exactly win any awards for politeness and sympathy with his opening lines. He really is saying that it is easy for Job to be a light and comfort to others when things are going well. But now that evil has struck, Job is “troubled.” Yet, that is what should happen, right? After all, God is holy and righteous (good). So whatever evil that comes upon us is deserved.

Read Job 4:12–21. What other argument does Eliphaz make to Job?

There are many interesting things one could look at here. These include how these men understood the nature and character (thoughts; feelings; actions) of the true God, even before the rise of the nation of Israel. This whole book shows us that the forefathers of the people of Israel and, later, the people of Israel themselves know something of the Lord. Here, in fact, we find Eliphaz trying to defend the character of God.

What Eliphaz hears in “visions of the night” is in many ways very good religious teaching (read Psalm 103:14; Isaiah 64:7; Romans 3:19, 20). We as humans are clay, we are short-lived, and we can be crushed as easily as a moth. And, of course, what man or woman can be more righteous (holy) than God?

But Eliphaz’s words are not effective and miss the point. The problem with Job is not whether Job is better than God. That is not Job’s complaint. Job mostly talks about just how terrible he feels and how much he is suffering. Job is not talking about how he is somehow more righteous than God.

But Eliphaz seems to think that is exactly what Job is saying. After all, if God is just, and evil comes only upon evil, then Job must have done something wrong to deserve what he is going through. So Job’s complaints are unfair. Eager to defend God, Eliphaz starts to scold Job. Even more than just whatever wisdom he believes he has about God, Eliphaz claims to have something else special from God to support his position: a dream. But the only problem is that the position he takes misses the point.

What can we learn from this story about how, even if we are right, we might not be speaking the truth in the most helpful and positive way?

THE FOOLISH TAKING ROOT (Job 5)

In chapter 5, Eliphaz continues with his argument. It is mostly the same as what he says in the earlier chapter. Evil happens only to evil people. Imagine how this must have felt to Job, who knew that it could not be right. And that he did not deserve his present situation.

But there is a problem here. Not all that Eliphaz says here is wrong. Many of these same thoughts are repeated in other parts of the Bible.

How do these verses reflect the beliefs and feelings shown in Job 5?

Psalm 37:10 _____

Proverbs 26:2 _____

Luke 1:52 _____

1 Corinthians 3:19 _____

Psalm 34:6 _____

Hebrews 12:5 _____

Hosea 6:1 _____

Psalm 33:19 _____

RUSH TO JUDGMENT (Matthew 7:1, 2)



Satan is wrestling with those whom we scold, and our rough words discourage them and cause them to fail.

Much of what Eliphaz says to Job is correct. That is, he makes many good points. These points are repeated later in the Bible. But something still is terribly wrong with Eliphaz's answer to Job. The problem is not with what Eliphaz says. Instead, the problem is that he tries to make his words mean something they are not meant to say.

Our world is not simple or easy. It is easy to look at a situation and then quote a few Bible verses that you think might be helpful to that situation. Maybe they are. But often they are not. Read this quote from Ellen G. White about how we often bring upon ourselves the things that happen to us. "The Bible very clearly teaches that what we do is the result of what we are. A large part of the experiences of life are the end result of our own thoughts and actions."—Adapted from *Education*, page 146.

This truth is a deep and important one. But could you imagine a Christian believer who means well but reads this Ellen G. White quote to someone who has problems like Job's? (In some cases, unfortunately, we can imagine that.) How much better would it have been for the well-meaning Christian to have followed this advice for himself or herself instead? "Many think that they are showing the justice of God while they fully fail to show His great love. Often the ones whom they meet and scold strictly are under the pressure of temptation. Satan is wrestling with these souls, and rough, unsympathetic words discourage them and cause them to fall into the tempter's power."—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Ministry [Work Done for God] of Healing*, page 163.

The fact is there is much more going on here than Eliphaz, Job, and all the others know. So Eliphaz's rushing to judgment, even with all his right understanding of religion, is not the right thing to do in this situation.

Read Matthew 7:1, 2; Romans 2:1–3; and 1 Corinthians 4:5. Why should these verses always be in the forefront of our minds when dealing with anyone, especially those whom we believe have sinned?

Suppose Eliphaz had been right in that Job had brought this suffering upon himself. Even so, his words were impolite and ill-timed. Job stands as a symbol for all people. All of us have been caught up in the great controversy (war between Christ and Satan). And we all suffer in it. And we all, at some point, need mercy and sympathy, not scolding.

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: As we have seen, Eliphaz is not without sympathy for Job. It is just that his sympathy takes second place to what he believes is his need to defend the character of God. After all, Job is suffering terribly, and God is just. So he thinks that Job must have done something to deserve what happened to him. That is what God's justice is all about, Eliphaz decides. So Job is wrong in his complaining.

Of course, God is just. But that does not automatically mean that we will find His justice made clear in every situation that happens in this sinful world. The fact is, we do not. Justice and judgment will come but not necessarily now (Revelation 20:12). Part of what it means to live by faith is to trust God that the justice so lacking here will one day be shown and made clear to all of us.

What we find with Eliphaz also appears in the attitude (thoughts and feelings) of some of the scribes³ and Pharisees⁴ toward Jesus. These men are caught up in their desire to be “faithful” and religious. Their anger at the Lord's Sabbath healings (read Matthew 12) prevents them from being happy that the sick have been healed and have been freed from their suffering. No matter how clear Christ's words are in the following verse, we who love God and who are jealous for Him must always remember: “ ‘How terrible for you, teachers of the law and Pharisees! You pretenders! You give God a tenth [tithe] of your spices, like mint, dill and cummin. But you have not practiced the more important things of the law, like fairness, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the last things without failing to do the first’ ” (Matthew 23:23, NIV).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1 How can we know the difference between the time when someone needs mercy and sympathy and when a person needs to be scolded? Why would it generally be better to be full of mercy and sympathy when dealing with those who are suffering, even though it may be because of their own sins and wrong actions?
- 2 Read again Eliphaz's words to Job in chapters 4 and 5. In what situation might those words have been more proper and correct than they were here?
- 3 Suppose you had been a friend of Job and had gone to visit him as he sat on the pile of ashes. What would you have said to him, and why? If that had been you in his place, what would you want people to say to you?

DEFINITIONS

3. scribe—a person in Bible times whose job was to copy manuscripts and books and to study and teach Scripture.

4. Pharisee—a member of a Jewish group in Jesus' time that followed Jewish religious laws and teachings very strictly.