

**Good Word Schedule**  
**“The Book of Job”**  
**October, November, December 2016**

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**Theme: The End**

**Leading Question:** If one loses 10 children through disaster, does the blessing of an additional 10 children in the end make for a happy ending to the book of Job?

If one is interested in the theodicy question – the attempt to justify (vindicate) a good God in the presence of evil – two books of the Bible come into focus, both in the Old Testament. Job and Ecclesiastes come under the general heading of “wisdom literature” and belong to a sub-set of wisdom known as the skeptical tradition. The two books, however, differ radically in their approach to the problem of evil. In Job one confronts the anguished passion of Job over his personal disaster while Ecclesiastes simply presents the reader with an unemotional shrug at the general chaos in the world.

Virtually all scholars would see Job as one of the earliest books in the Bible, reflecting the nomadic era of Abraham. Hence the tradition that Moses was the author. By contrast, Ecclesiastes, though attributed to Solomon, is seen by many in the scholarly community as being a voice from the end of the Old Testament period. Ironically, however, both books only became canonical at the end of the Hebrew Old Testament, finding their place in the third section of the Hebrew Bible, the Writings (*Kethubim*).

Unlike Ecclesiastes, which is simply a collection of diverse wisdom sayings, Job presents the reader with a plot that grapples with the question of unexplained tragedy. Job is a wealthy and devout nomad who regularly seeks God’s presence. But then, not only does tragedy strike his family, his wealth is also destroyed. Through dialogue with “friends,” followed by a pointed monologue from God, Job gropes for understanding. In the end, God declares Job more honorable than his friends and his wealth is restored along with a second family of three daughters and seven sons, just like his first family.

For understanding the book, the structure is crucial. Here is a brief outline of the parts:

**Job 1-2: Prologue:** Five scenes, three on earth and two in heaven:

- 1) On earth: Wealthy and devout Job prays for his family
- 2) In heaven: When God points out his faithful servant Job to Satan, the Adversary, Satan simply declares that Job is faithful because God has bribed him. God grants Satan permission to take away Job’s wealth.
- 3) On earth: Multiple tragedies strike Job’s children and wipe away his wealth. Job declares his continuing allegiance: “The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away. Blessed be the name of the LORD.”
- 4) In heaven: God boasts to Satan about Job’s faithfulness in the face of unprovoked tragedies. Satan retorts that if he could touch Job’s body, curses would replace piety. “He’s in your hands,” replied God. “Just don’t take his life.”
- 5) On earth: Job is afflicted with sores from head to foot. Then Job’s friends arrive to comfort him.

**Job 3-31: Three cycles of debate:** Dialogue between Job and his three friends: Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar.

**Job 32-37: Elihu's response:** The young man Elihu responds with critical comments for both Job and his three friends.

**Job 38 -41:6 Job in Dialogue with God:**

**38 - 40:2:** Divine confrontation with Job from the storm, part 1.

**40: 3-5:** Job replies meekly.

**40:6 - 41:34:** Divine confrontation with Job from the storm, part 2.

**42:1-6:** Job capitulates to divine power.

**Job 42:7-16: Epilogue:** Job's wealth is restored and dies an "old man and full of years."

One tantalizing feature of the book of Job is the fact that two heavenly scenes in the prologue where Satan appears are the only places in the entire book where Satan appears. That means that the author of the book and the reader are aware of the real cause of Job's problem, but Job is not. In fact, most of the Old Testament seems to be oblivious to the presence of Satan. Besides the book of Job, Satan as an explicit supernatural opponent of God only appears in two other passages, both written or canonized toward the end of the Old Testament: 1 Chronicles 21:1, in the last book in the Hebrew Old Testament, Satan is said to be the one who motivated David to number Israel. In the earlier parallel passage (2 Sam. 24:1), it is God who instigates the fatal census – and then punishes David for it. The other OT passage where Satan appears is Zechariah 3:1-2, where Satan is the accuser of Joshua the high priest and is rebuked by God.

Apparently the risk of polytheism was so great for most of the Old Testament that God chose to assume full responsibility for evil. Only later, toward the end of the Old Testament and on in to the New Testament, do we see more clearly God's adversary at work.

For a more complete discussion of the role of Satan in the Old Testament, see chapter 3 from *Who's Afraid of the Old Testament God?* "Whatever Happened to Satan in the Old Testament?" It is appended to the end of this lesson.

**Question:** To what extent is the restoration of Job in the end (42:7-16) a hopeful note or a troubling one? Or is it both?

**Note:** The Christian hope in the resurrection is suggested in certain passages in Job, but from the standpoint of the author and his first readers, the resurrection was not yet an explicit hope. In the Hebrew Bible, the final line of Job is vintage Old Testament: "Job died and old man and full of years" (42:16). The Septuagint, the Greek Old Testament, however, coming much closer to New Testament times – perhaps 200 BCE – added the resurrection hope to its version of Job 42:16: "And he will live again with those whom the Lord raises up."

**Question:** Though devout conservatives generally want to see all truths as being clear throughout Scripture, is it not possible to see growth and progression, so that some truths only become clear

at a later date?

**Question:** What kind of hope is suggested in Job 14:14-15?

The question raised in Job 14:14 is an intriguing one: “If someone dies, will they live again?” In Hebrew the implied answer is “No.” The NLT puts it this way: “Can the dead live again? If so, this would give me hope through all my years of struggle, and I would eagerly await the release of death.”

**Note:** There seems to be a clear impulse toward resurrection in Job 14, but the concrete evidence for such a hope is not yet clear.

**Question:** How does the Adventist idea of “present truth” potentially illuminate the idea of a future hope in the book of Job?

**Note:** In the context of the 1888 discussion over righteousness by faith, Ellen White used the phrase “present truth” to refer to ideas that were at one time were not clear, but had now become truth for the present moment. This quotation is particularly revealing:

The message “Go forward” is still to be heard and respected. The varying circumstances taking place in our world call for labor which will meet these peculiar developments. The Lord has need of men who are spiritually sharp and clear-sighted, men worked by the Holy Spirit, who are certainly receiving manna fresh from heaven. Upon the minds of such, God’s Word flashes light, revealing to them more than ever before the safe path. The Holy Spirit works upon mind and heart. The time has come when through God’s messengers the scroll is being unrolled to the world. Instructors in our schools should never be bound about by being told that they are to teach only what has been taught hitherto. Away with these restrictions. There is a God to give the message His people shall speak. Let not any minister feel under bonds or be gauged by men’s measurement. The Gospel must be fulfilled in accordance with the messages God sends. **That which God gives His servants to speak today would not perhaps have been present truth twenty years ago, but it is God’s message for this time.** – From MS 8a 1888, address to ministers on October 21, 1888, with apparent reference to a telegram from the “absent and ailing” president who urged the delegates to “stand by the landmarks” [A. V. Olson, *Thirteen Crisis Years* (1981) 282] = EGW1888, 133.

## Appendix to Lesson #1

Chapter 3, “Whatever happened to Satan in the Old Testament?”

Alden Thompson, *Who’s Afraid of the Old Testament God?* (1988, 1989, 2000, 2003, 2011)

Available from [www.Amazon.com](http://www.Amazon.com) and [www.adventistbookcenter.com](http://www.adventistbookcenter.com)

### Whatever happened to Satan in the Old Testament?

*Now the serpent was more subtle than any other  
wild creature that the Lord God had made. –  
Genesis 3:1*

If the suggestion developed in the last chapter is correct, it would be quite appropriate to say that God created a good world, but let it go wild. If he is a freedom-loving God, his creatures must have the right to rebel, in spite of all the tragic consequences that can come from such a course. But then God seeks to win his creatures back. He meets them where they are and seeks to draw them step by step along a better path.

All that sounds fine – until I actually turn to the Old Testament. There I find descriptions of God’s activity that make me very uncomfortable. At first sight, some of the incidents seem to suggest that he is not a freedom-loving God after all, but is quite arbitrary. Let’s note some of the more disturbing problems.

In the story of the Exodus from Egypt, the biblical account says on more than one occasion that “God hardened Pharaoh’s heart” (Ex. 7:3; 9:12). Now that sounds like something much more appropriate to Satan than to a good God. Why would God want to harden a man’s heart, setting him on a self-destructive course which would also bring others to ruin? Taken at face value, the words present a real problem for those of us who claim that God is good.

A story that is perhaps even more curious is found in 2 Samuel 24. It deals with a census ordered by King David. Although the biblical story does not offer an explanation, David was apparently keen to find out just how large an army he could field, an act that would have been seen in that era as stemming from wrongful pride. Even his crusty general Joab knew such a course to be wrong (2 Sam. 24:3), but David went ahead. According to the story in 2 Samuel, even though David belatedly confessed his sin, the Lord announced to David through the prophet Gad that punishment was on the way, though David would have the “privilege” of choosing the mode of punishment. All that seems a bit strange to us, but the most difficult part of the whole story is the introduction which explains God’s role in the incident: “Again the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he incited David against them saying ‘Go, number Israel and Judah’” (2 Sam. 24: 1). Then as noted above, the Lord punished David for his act (2 Sam. 24:10 ff). Now how could a good God actually incite a wrong act which that same God would then proceed to punish? From our point of view the story is inexplicable.

Moving to a slightly different type of incident, we could list numerous examples of God’s stepping in and directly administering punishment. We might be more comfortable with a view which says that God *allows* the sinner to receive the punishment which his sin merits. Why does God have to wade in with his own scorpions and serpents? Does not sin bring its own

punishment? One example should be sufficient to illustrate the point. Numbers 21 describes one of Israel's repeated rebellions. Rather than providing a picture of a God who reluctantly allows his people to flaunt his protecting care, to be pummeled about by the harsh realities of life, the biblical writer gives us a quick glimpse of the anger of the Lord: "Then the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people and they bit the people so that many people of Israel died" (Num. 21:6). This type of description has led some to conclude that the Old Testament God is indeed arbitrary: "If you don't do it my way, I'll send out my serpents to bite you." Some Christians react against such a picture, while others actually use these very passages to shore up an authoritarian view of religious life: "Don't ask any questions. Do it because say so."

Now in each of the examples noted above, if I simply take the words at face value without placing the incidents in a larger framework, the resultant view of the Old Testament God can be a harsh one indeed. That is why it is so important to develop the overall framework within which we can interpret the Old Testament. In the last chapter I suggested that the great degeneracy evident in the Old Testament is to be understood against the background of a great cosmic struggle between good and evil. That the universe may be more secure in the end, God provides the freedom necessary for evil to develop. The process is slow and dangerous when viewed from a human point of view and it seems as though God is taking great risks with his reputation. But the end result is the vindication of God against all the accusations of his Adversary.

Yet even if one accepts that type of framework within which one may interpret the Old Testament, one of the great surprises in the actual reading of Scripture is the very poor publicity which the Adversary receives in the Old Testament. In fact, if I were in his place I think I would complain rather vigorously. There are hints of his activities in such places as Genesis 3 and of course in the book of Job, but if you really make a careful search of the Old Testament, specific references to the demonic, to Satan, or the Devil are very sparse indeed. As a matter of fact, a concordance will reveal only three passages in all of the Old Testament where a specific demonic being named Satan appears: Job 1-2, 1 Chron. 21:1, and Zech. 3:1-2. Traditional Christian theology assigns a fairly significant role to Satan, and he certainly is quite prominent in the New Testament. Why then does he have such a low profile in the Old Testament?

Before exploring the possible reasons for Satan's infrequent appearance in the Old Testament, we need to take a closer look at the Old Testament word for "Satan." The English word "Satan" is in fact a straight transliteration of the Hebrew word *Satan*. And though the word normally suggests to us a supreme evil personality, Satan with a capital "S," the earlier Old Testament usage applies the term to any "adversary" or "accuser." For example, when Solomon turned away from God, "The Lord raised up an *adversary (satan)* against Solomon, Hadad the Edomite" (I Kings 11:14). The RSV has translated the Hebrew word *satan* as "adversary" and it clearly refers to a human being. Likewise, when the Philistines went up to battle against Israel, a number of the leaders were reluctant to have David join them, even though he had been living in their midst: "Lest in the battle he become an *adversary (satan)* to us" (I Sam. 29:4). So David could turn into a *satan*! But perhaps the most fascinating use of the word is in the story of Balaam. There the angel of the Lord opposed Balaam and "took his stand in the way as his *adversary (satan)*" (Num. 22:22). Thus the biblical writers could apply the word *satan* to Hadad, an enemy of Solomon, to David, and to the angel of the Lord. But in each of these incidents the word simply means something like "adversary" as most of our English translations indicate.

In the later use of the term, biblical writers begin to think of a supreme Adversary, *the*

Satan with a capital “S,” representing the great opponent of God. But many Bible scholars hold that even in the three Old Testament passages where the Hebrew word *satan* clearly refers to an individual superhuman adversary, the English word “satan” should still be written with a lower case “s.” The seeds of the New Testament understanding of Satan are clearly there, but Satan’s supreme status as chief of all demons is not yet really clear.

Now when we cite evidence suggesting that the Old Testament understanding of Satan developed gradually, we need to remind ourselves that God has not given all truths to all men at all times. If Old Testament people have fallen far from God, then we must not expect everyone everywhere to have the same understanding. The Old Testament was written over a long period of time and this is reflected in the way that the various writers describe God’s activities. A single event may be described by two later writers, both quite removed in time from the original event. The emphasis and interpretation of each writer will reflect his own special circumstances and, at times, two accounts may even appear to be contradictory. But if we make the necessary adjustments for time and place, we can discover the underlying harmony that is important for understanding God’s activities. Perhaps the best examples of differing emphasis and interpretation is provided in the comparison between Samuel-Kings and Chronicles in the Old Testament, and in the comparison of the gospels in the New.

Now as far as Satan’s role in the Old Testament is concerned, both Jewish and Christian writers have assumed the presence of Satan in many biblical incidents even though the original account without Satan and the later interpretation with Satan can be very useful. One writer has simply chosen to define the role of the demonic, while the other has elected to focus on the omnipotence of God.

If, however, the demonic is indeed a force to be reckoned with in life, the existence of the Devil cannot depend on whether or not a given writer mentions him. Either Satan has been at work in the history of this world or he has not. Without question, traditional Christian doctrine assigns a definite role to Satan. Hence the pertinence of the question: Whatever has happened to Satan in the Old Testament?

## DANGERS OF EMPHASIZING THE DEMONIC

As a first step in answering that question, perhaps we could ask about the possible dangers that might arise in a primitive society from an emphasis on the demonic. By looking at various primitive cultures where the demonic plays a much more visible role, we can discover some interesting implications. Pagan religions are often dominated by fear. By definition, demons or evil deities cannot be trusted, so primitive people took all manner of superstitious precautions to protect themselves from the demonic. In ancient Israel, however, the use of magic and consultation with ‘wizards that peep and mutter’ was strictly forbidden (cf. Lev. 19:31; Is. 8:19). Israel’s God could be trusted. Such trust, however, was not possible when the authority of demons held sway.

From a more strictly theological point of view, an active awareness of the demonic runs the risk of developing into polytheism or dualism. Ancient Israel emerged from a thoroughly polytheistic society in Egypt. Had God chosen to highlight the role of a satanic figure, the condition of the people could have made dualism, if not polytheism, a likely threat to the purity of the faith that God was seeking to establish. Thus the wording of the first command at Sinai

may be more significant than a superficial reading might suggest: 'You shall have no other gods before me' (Ex. 20:3). Note that in this instance, God does not expressly deny the existence of other gods. He simply asks that Israel worship him exclusively. Other passages in Scripture greatly ridicule the worship of other gods and the worship of idols (cf. Deut. 29:16-17; Is. 44:9-20), but the evidence from the Old Testament is that the people in general had a difficult time focusing their attention on the one true God. Even when they were right with him, the threat of neighboring deities was a real one. Thus, for practical reasons, God treated Israel very much as a wise father might treat a young son if the two of them were to set out on a jaunt through the woods. To warn a small lad of wildcats, bears, and snakes, could be quite unsettling. So the father simply says: 'Trust me. Whatever happens, I will take care of it.'

That is very much what I see happening at Sinai and in much of the Old Testament, The first great step that God asked Israel to take was: 'Worship the one God who brought you out of Egypt.' The knowledge about Satan would have to come later when their faith was more stable. And this late appearance of Satan seems to be precisely what we find in the Old Testament, for as we look at the three Old Testament passages where a specific *Satan* is mentioned as God's opponent, in each case, the passage appears in a book that was either written or canonized late in the Old Testament period. But the question of early and late and the matter of canonization requires at least a brief explanation before we proceed.

#### CAN WE DATE OLD TESTAMENT MATERIAL?

Any attempt actually to date Old Testament material is fraught with difficulty, for the Old Testament books themselves give very little direct information about the time of writing. The only clear-cut dating material comes from the prophetic books where specific prophetic oracles are often assigned to the reign of a specific king (e.g. Jer. 25:1; 26:1; 27:1). But a great many of the Old Testament books remain anonymous. In some cases earlier stories are retold, as when the book of Chronicles retells some of the stories from Samuel and Kings. But how do we know that Chronicles is retelling the stories of Kings and not the other way around? That is particularly a problem for the uninitiated reader who happens to be reading in Kings and finds references to the 'Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah' (cf. 1 Kings 14:30). In this particular instance a more careful reading of the books of Kings and Chronicles clearly suggests that Kings comes before Chronicles and that the 'chronicles' mentioned in Kings are official court records, not our book of Chronicles in the Old Testament.

One of the more helpful ways at arriving at early and late for all of the biblical books, at least in a very general way, is to look at the canon of Scripture as held by the ancient Hebrews. Where the indications of the time of writing are slim, the place of a book within the canon can be enlightening. That term 'canon', however, also requires at least a brief explanation.

In its early usage, the word 'canon' simply means 'rule' or 'norm'. With reference to Scripture it means those books accepted by a particular community as authoritative, the books providing the norm or rule by which the community chooses to live. Other books may be held to be just as 'true' and in some cases just as 'inspired', but for reasons that are seldom known to us, the community did not accept them as canonical, that is, as permanently authoritative. Presumably there are sayings of Isaiah and Jeremiah, of Paul and of Jesus which did not find their way into our Scriptures, but are just as true and just as 'inspired' as the ones which did, or at



least the early recipients of those words would have held them just as true and just as 'inspired.'.

Protestant Christians generally accept the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments as their canon. Roman Catholics accept certain of the so-called Apocryphal books in addition. The Jewish believers accept only the thirty-nine Old Testament books (twenty-four by their reckoning), and even within those books the Jewish community sees different levels of authority, depending on the section in which a book appears. And that is the part that is of particular interest to us.

A New Testament reference actually identifies the three major sections of the Hebrew canon: 'the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms' (Luke 24:44). The process by which God worked among his people to designate particular books as 'Scripture' is one that will always remain mysterious. We must simply admit that the Spirit led the community of God's people to recognize certain books as containing the word of the Lord in a way that would be enduring for all time. The Old Testament canon was certainly complete by New Testament times as Luke 24:44 suggests. Furthermore, scholars would generally assign the following, dates for each of the three sections: 400 BC for the Law (Genesis through Deuteronomy); 200 BC for the second section, the Prophets (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea-Malachi); and 100 BC for the third section, the Writings (designated in Luke by its largest book, Psalms: Ruth, Ezra to Song of Solomon, Lamentations, Daniel, Chronicles). These dates are really just educated guesses; the canonization of the various sections may have been complete earlier or later, but for our purposes it is significant to note that canonization took place in three steps and that it took place over a period of time.

It is also important to remember that canonization is not particularly concerned with authorship. A book may have been written long before it was canonized or a book may tell a story that happened many centuries before the book was finally accepted as canonical. At least the process of canonization gives us some guide as to when the community was willing to accept a particular book as authoritative for all time.

Now let us return to the three Old Testament passages which mention Satan and look at them in the light of the statement made earlier, namely, that the books in which these passages occur were either written or were canonized towards the end of the Old Testament period. A comment on each passage might prove helpful.

## SATAN AND THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

*1 Chronicles 21:1* Of the three passages, this one is in some ways the most important and interesting because it is part of the retelling of the story of David's census mentioned at the beginning of this chapter (2 Samuel 24). Not only is Chronicles in the third section of the Hebrew canon, but it is also the very last book in the Hebrew Bible. Hence it contains the very last interpretation of Old Testament material. And in fact the book of Chronicles is just that, a final interpretation of the period of the monarchy. In the course of retelling that story, the biblical writer makes a startling modification to the story of David's census. The earlier account said that the Lord (Yahweh) was responsible for the census, but in Chronicles: '*Satan* stood up against Israel, and incited David to number Israel' (1 Chron. 21:1). The inspired writer now sees that an Adversary was responsible for the evil deed, and not the Lord. A remarkable difference indeed.

Now if we are too concerned about harmonizing biblical accounts, we may miss the significance of this passage, so let us pause just a moment to consider the implications. There is a sense in which both passages can be seen to be true. If God is truly all-powerful, then he is ultimately responsible for everything that happens. Both the author of Chronicles and the author of Samuel would most assuredly agree with that. But whereas the earlier author was still operating with the view that the Lord is the *active cause* of everything, the later writer sees evil events happening with the *permission* of the Lord, Perhaps an illustration can clarify the point: instead of taking whip in hand to punish the children for munching green apples, the Lord allows them to receive the stomach ache which is the appropriate reward for eating forbidden fruit. And there is quite a difference in those two approaches.

I am much more comfortable with the way that 1 Chronicles tells the story, but I must also recognize the implications of the story as told in 2 Samuel, namely, that the Lord was willing to assume full responsibility for evil. Perhaps the reason was, as suggested above, his pastoral concern for his people. And if the Lord was willing thus to portray himself as responsible for evil, then suddenly we have a handle for understanding a whole group of problem passages in the Old Testament, including the hardening of Pharaoh's heart and the sending of the serpents. There is a sense in which the Lord is still responsible for all that happens; but now I have a biblical basis for saying that he *permits* instead of *causes* evil, even in those passages where he is actual described as causing it.

Now some may be uncomfortable with this approach and might suggest that I am putting my own interpretation on the words instead of taking the Bible 'just as it reads'. I will admit that I have put an interpretation on the biblical account. Upon reflection, we would probably all admit that every sin e word in Scripture, in fact, every word everywhere, must be interpreted, No word or sentence has meaning by itself. It is always read by a person with a particular background and infused with particular meaning. That is why 'father' can mean something quite different to me from what it does to someone else. When I hear the word 'father', I think of my Dad and have a very positive picture. But someone with a cruel father would see things quite differently.

So we must interpret Scripture. We have no choice. That is why the Christian admonition to approach Scripture always in the attitude of prayer is so very important. If I do not seek the Lord and ask him to guide me into the knowledge of himself, I will certainly misinterpret and misapply Scripture. When I come to interpret his Word I must use all the mental machinery that I can muster, but whether or not I use that machinery in the proper manner depends on my vision of God. It is not a question of faith or reason, but rather, whether or not I will choose to use my reason faithfully.

Now my reason tells me that there is a difference between 2 Samuel 24:1 and 1 Chronicles 21:1. The more I have reflected on that difference, the more significant it has become. As a matter of fact, you could perhaps 'blame' this entire book on those two verses. At least it would be safe to say that these two verses provided the catalyst for the method of interpretation which I am suggesting in the book. That was why I said earlier that, of the three passages which mention Satan in the Old Testament, 1 Chronicles 21:1 is the most significant one. That was a personal testimony.

*Zechariah 3:1-2* This passage requires only a short comment. Although the book of Zechariah is in the second section of the Hebrew canon, the book itself provides the information

which allows us to say that it was one of the very last of the prophetic books. In fact, it was written well after the close of the Babylonian exile. In this passage, Satan appears as the adversary of Joshua. The setting is evidently a judgment scene; the Lord rebukes the Adversary, restoring Joshua to right standing. Hence the passage provides a helpful illumination of the cosmic antagonism: the Lord is for us; the Adversary is against us. In the end, good triumphs as the Lord rebukes the Adversary and restores his people.

*Job 1:6-12; 2:1-7* These verses in Job are certainly the best known of all the Old Testament passages which mention Satan. Scripture nowhere tells us who wrote the book of Job or when it was written, More traditional Christian writers have often tended to adopt the dominant Jewish tradition about the book, namely that Moses was its author. Actually, Jewish speculation about the book was wide-ranging. When the rabbis discussed the question of when Job lived, they propounded suggestions that ranged all the way from the time of the great patriarch Abraham to the post-exilic Persian period and the time of Esther. In fact, the rabbi who suggested that Job was a contemporary of Esther used a clever piece of logic which is likely to elude anyone who has not been immersed in rabbinic logic: Job lived in the time of Ahasuerus because the book of job says that Job's daughters were the fairest in all the land. When was the time of fair women? The time of Esther. Therefore, Job lived at the time of Esther. [See the Babylonian Talmud: *Baba Bathra 15b*, English translation by the Soncino Press London.] Perhaps it is not difficult to see why the tradition of Mosaic authorship seemed more convincing.

Regardless of who wrote the book, it appears in the third section of the Hebrew canon, suggesting that it was not accepted as authoritative until very late in the biblical period. The story itself bears every mark of being a most ancient one and perhaps it was the very mention of Satan that proved a hindrance to its general acceptance since Satan is not explicitly mentioned in the Law, and only once in a late prophetic book. Yet you will notice that Satan actually makes a very limited appearance even in the book of Job, a point which merits further comment.

One of the fascinating aspects of the book of Job lies in the fact that Job himself, his wife, and his friends, apparently know nothing of the satanic attack; at least there is no evidence for such knowledge in the book itself. Furthermore, when Job begins to realize the seriousness of his problem and when his friends attempt to needle him into repenting of his sins, sins which were non-existent from Job's point of view, Job argues with God, not with Satan. He clearly sees God as the author of his difficulties (cf. Job 16:7-17; 19:6-13). Even in one of the passages where Satan does appear, God says to Satan: 'You moved me against him, to destroy him without cause' (Job 2:3). So in the book of Job, the figure of Satan makes only a very cautious appearance. God is still responsible for what happens, and all the primary actors in the drama see God as all in all.

In looking a little more closely at the two passages where Satan does appear in Job, we must recognize how important the structure of the book is for its interpretation. The book of Job consists of a prose prologue (1-2) and a prose epilogue (42:7-17). In between is the poetic body of the book, consisting of a lively dialogue between Job and 'friends' (3-31), a monologue by the young man Elihu (32-37), followed by the divine response out of the whirlwind (38-42:1-6). In the prologue there are five separate scenes, three depicting Job's situation on earth, interspersed with the two heavenly scenes where Satan and God discuss Job's integrity. Taking away scenes two and four, the ones where Satan appears, leaves the world scene as Job saw it. Only the addition of these two scenes gives the setting of the cosmic struggle between God and his

Adversary, between good and evil. As is the case with every disaster scene in the earth, the causes and responsibility for the events are terribly difficult to untangle. We sometimes suffer because we deserve to, but often the troubles seem so undeserved. The book of Job attempts to provide some framework for handling the problem: a cosmic struggle in which the very character of God is under attack. We have already seen some evidence thus far in our discussion as to just how significant the cosmic struggle is for the method that I am suggesting one should use in approaching the Old Testament. The forces of evil must have their day in court if God is going to win in the end.

Before moving on to further implications of the disappearance of Satan from the Old Testament, I would like to comment just briefly on those passages in the Old Testament which do not explicitly mention Satan but which have been interpreted within the Christian community as applying to Satan: Genesis 3; Isaiah 14:12-15; and Ezekiel 28:11-19.

In Genesis 3, an unbiased reader will strongly suspect the animosity which exists between the serpent and God, pointing in the direction of a full-fledged Adversary relationship. But the serpent figure is, in fact, an ambiguous one in the Old Testament. The serpent attack recorded in Numbers 21 is successfully warded off by Moses' raising a brass serpent, the later symbol of the opponent of God! There is even evidence to suggest that the people began to worship this serpent; thus it had to be destroyed (2 Kings 18:4).

The first clear identification of the serpent as Satan in Judeo-Christian writings does not come until Revelation 12:9. There is no doubt; the Dragon, the Serpent, the Devil, and Satan are all one and the same. Considering the strong role that the serpent plays in Christian interpretation, it is perhaps surprising that his identity is never really clarified in the Old Testament. An explanation might lie in the fact that in Egypt, the serpent is both a symbol of a good deity and of an evil one. The biblical writers thus could not really develop the serpent motif without raising the spectre of dualism or something worse.

Turning to Isaiah 14:12-15 and Ezekiel 28:11-19, we find two passages which share several similar characteristics. Both passages have been applied to the 'prehistory' of Satan and both appear in prophetic oracles or 'taunt-songs' against heathen kings. Isaiah 14 is directed against the king of Babylon; Ezekiel 28 is directed against the prince or king of Tyre. Modern scholarship has been very much intrigued with the parallels between these passages and similar passages in the literature of other Ancient Near Eastern cultures. Two general conclusions can be drawn from the research done on these passages. First, that the parallels in pagan cultures are striking indeed; second, that the prophets themselves are speaking of the historical enemies of Israel, not of the supernatural realm. The supernatural appears only by way of analogy. In other words, most modern scholars would say that these prophetic oracles would not have been understood by an Old Testament audience as describing Satan. That conclusion seems to be verified by the fact that the first clear application of the Lucifer passage, Isaiah 14:12-15, to Satan, was not made until the time of Tertullian, a church father who died in AD 240.

The history of the interpretation of Ezekiel 28:11-19 is less clear, for the passage has been applied not only to a supernatural being, but to the first man as well (cf. RSV), a problem of interpretation which stems from ambiguity in the original text. In any event, the application to Satan was apparently not made until several centuries into the Christian era.

The question naturally arises: is it legitimate to apply these passages to Satan when such was apparently not the intent of the original author? That is a difficult question to answer, for

within the Christian tradition, an interpretation has often been drawn from a biblical passage which was clearly not the one intended by the original writer. A second meaning may have been implied but that is quite a different matter from saying that such a meaning was the one intended by the original writer. Nevertheless, as long as we do not use a second application to obscure our study and understanding of the author's original intent, such second meanings can be useful. Certainly if we choose to stand within traditional Christianity we must be willing to admit that such secondary meanings have been very popular within the Christian community, and to a certain extent, we must be resigned to such an approach even if we aren't very happy with it. But the problem has been that such traditional interpretations have often obscured or even replaced the original meaning. I actually suspect that the vehemence with which traditional Christian positions are sometimes attacked is a direct result of Christian reluctance to admit the first meaning of the text. Thus, one of my concerns as I write this book, is to show that it is possible to stand within a conservative Christian tradition and still be able to read the Old Testament for the purpose of discovering its most likely original meaning.

But after admitting that the original intent of Isaiah 14:12-15 and Ezekiel 28: 11-19 was probably not to outline the pre-history of Satan, I still suspect that Satan is lurking somewhere in those passages. Connected with that suspicion is the probability that the prophets have apparently borrowed from cultures other than their own. We must make it clear, however, that prophets are free to 'borrow' whatever they choose and from wherever they might wish. It is the final product that is the result of the divine inspiration, not the bits and pieces. Yet even if that is the case, what right do we have to suspect that pagan religions had bits and pieces of a sort that could be used? That is where I think we ought to take the events of Genesis 3-11 more seriously. Whatever mankind may have originally known about the cosmic struggle would have certainly made its way into pagan cultures and would have come in a distorted fashion to that line of patriarchs which retained the slender thread of the knowledge of the true God. Suddenly, here in prophetic literature, bits and pieces of that cosmic struggle begin to appear, but in a way which does not threaten God's first concern, the development of faith in him as the one true God. Certainly Isaiah 14:12-15 and Ezekiel 28:11-19 do define the *issues* of the cosmic struggle, namely, that selfishness and pride are the supreme distortion of the will of God and lead inevitably towards full opposition to God himself. The personality of the Adversary, however, is certainly well hidden behind the mask of his quite human proteges. Perhaps, then, the primary criticism of the Christian usage of these passages stems from the impression that has often been given, that these passages must have clearly outlined in the Old Testament audience the knowledge of God's Adversary. Within the context of the approach of this book, I would say that such a knowledge was still too hot for the Old Testament to handle; it had to come later.

One further passage should perhaps be added here as touching on the demonic in the Old Testament, and that is Leviticus 16, the chapter that describes the ritual of the scapegoat (indicated in the RSV as the goat "for Azazel"-Hebrew azazel). Christian interpretation of this passage has often seen both goats, the one that was sacrificed and the one that was led into the wilderness, as types of Christ. But another interpretation of this passage with ancient as well as modern support suggests that the goat led out for or to Azazel represents a demonic element. This interpretation seems to find fairly early confirmation from the intertestamental book known as 1 Enoch, for when the unknown author of 1 Enoch wished to select a name for the leader of the fallen angelic spirits, he chose the name Azazel. Now if the demonic element was indeed

part of the original ritual, then perhaps here is an additional glimpse of the cosmic struggle between God and his Adversary; one goat was for the Lord and one for Azazel.

But after demonstrating just how little explicit information the Old Testament contains about Satan, we must turn our attention to the way in which the Old Testament writers handled the problem of evil in Satan's absence. Although they would often simply attribute violent acts directly to the Lord, they sometimes softened this picture by depicting other supernatural beings as the active agents in destroying and punishing. These beings belonged to a 'heavenly court' which was under the, direction of God. The role of this 'heavenly court' is something that we must look at more closely.

If Satan's role is not clearly defined in the Old Testament, then we might also expect to find a description of the celestial economy which differs in some respects from the traditional Christian view which builds more directly on New Testament data. Revelation 12:9 provides the essentials of the New Testament view and the one which generally has been adopted in Christian interpretation: Michael and his angels versus the Dragon and his angels. The cosmic struggle is full-blown. In the Old Testament, however, everything must take place under the direction of the one God. Thus the 'dragon and his angels' must be seen to be under divine management, though we can still catch glimpses of their misbehavior.

Perhaps an illustration from the human realm would be helpful in describing, the difference between the Old Testament view and the New Testament one. In the New Testament, the forces of good seem almost to represent a government in exile; the rulership of this world has been usurped by the dragon, the ruler of this age. The tension is deep, leading to open war, as is evident in the battleground description of Revelation 12. In the Old Testament, however, the situation would perhaps be similar to the tension between two political parties, one in power, the other in opposition. Both still operate within the one government, but the opposition at times betrays signs of disloyalty to government policy. We shall return later to the Old Testament view, but first we need to look at another aspect of the Old Testament which is quite pertinent to our discussion, an aspect which is both intriguing and difficult, the names for God.

## OLD TESTAMENT NAMES FOR GOD

As Christians, we are quite accustomed to the view that there is only one God. In my own case, for instance, I was so steeped in this belief, that it was surprising and difficult for me to recognize that for much of the Old Testament period, such a view was not so self-evident. I was aware that Israel's pagan neighbors worshiped other gods, but I had assumed that Israel clearly saw the absoluteness of the one God. To be sure, the Old Testament tells how Israel often turned aside to worship Baal; even with my 'high-road' orientation, I recognized that. But what about Israel when she was right with God? How strong were her convictions then? That was the part that I found surprising. For even when Israel was right with God, she apparently tended to look at her God as the God of Israel, but perhaps not really the God of her neighbors. It is in this context that the discussion of the names of God in the Old Testament becomes pertinent.

One of the ten commandments declares that God's name is not to be taken in vain. The later Jewish community was so serious about that command that it decided the safest course would be simply never to utter the name of God at all. That habit of scrupulously avoiding the name of God established a tradition that has continued right down to this very day even in the

Christian community. Thus users of the standard English translations (KJV, RSV, NEB, NIV) always read a substitute for the actual name of Israel's God. The story is a very complex one, but for our purposes we simply need to understand that, given Israel's situation in a world where there were many gods, the simple name 'God' was not specific enough for Israel's God. Thus, when God instructed Moses to lead Israel out of Egypt, he gave a personal name for Israel to use when addressing him, their own personal God. Most scholars now agree that this name was originally something like 'Yahweh'. Some modern translations (e. g, The Jerusalem Bible), actually use this name throughout the Old Testament, adding a most interesting flavor to familiar stories. Thus when we read the Old Testament, we discover that the Philistines had their Dagon, the Moabites had their Chemosh, the Syrians had their Rimmon, but Israel had Yahweh. And Israel also clearly understood that whatever the other nations claimed or believed, she herself was to have no other gods before this Yahweh.

Our modern English Bibles deliberately avoid using the name 'Yahweh', but by a very clever method, they do make it possible for the reader to know where an original Yahweh appears in the Hebrew: wherever you find LORD or GOD (written in small capital letters), that indicates the name Yahweh in the original Hebrew Bible. When you find 'Lord' applied to God (written with only the first letter capitalized), that is generally a translation of the word *Adonai*, a close equivalent to our English 'lord' in that it can refer to God or a human being, depending on the context; any authority figure could be an *adonai*. As for the word 'God' (written with only an initial capital), this represents the Hebrew *Elohim*. *Elohim* is like our English word 'god' in that it can refer to the one true God or to false gods. But *Elohim* is peculiar in that it is *plural* in form, so that precisely the same word could signify God, god, or gods, depending on the context. The above distinctions are important and can be quite helpful in illuminating some Old Testament passages; perhaps a diagram would be appropriate:

*Usage in English Bibles    Application to Hebrew Old Testament*

LORD or GOD	= Yahweh, the specific name of Israel's God
Lord	= Adonai, the general for any authority figure, human or divine
God	= Elohim, the general word for 'god,' plural in form, but can be plural or singular in meaning; only the context determines whether it should be translated as God, god, or gods.

The name 'Yahweh' as given to Moses is closely tied up with God's deliverance of his people from Egypt (Ex. 3:13-15; 6:2-8). This name had great potential for reminding Israel of an intimate personal relationship, just as any personal name when used by close friends yields much more warmth than 'Mr.', 'Mrs.', or 'Ms.'. *Elohim* could be used to refer to God and was used a great deal, but it was the name 'Yahweh' that carried the personal message and was the one name that could never be misunderstood as belonging to another more ordinary god.

But for understanding the way that the Old Testament handles the problem of evil, the word *Elohim* is the important one. In many ways it is almost like our English word 'angel', but unlike the common use of our English word 'angel', *Elohim* is often used for the supreme God.

In some passages in Scripture, the expression “sons of God” (*Elohim*) shades into the supernatural sense of 'angels'. This is quite clearly the case in Job, not only in the prologue where the 'sons of the Elohim' met before the Lord, Satan among them (Job 1:6; 2:1), but also in the poetic portion where 'sons of God' and 'morning stars' are parallel, suggesting supernatural beings who sang at the creation of the earth (Job 28:7).

## THE HEAVENLY COURT

It appears that these *Elohim* or sons of the *Elohim* are members of a heavenly court. In Job, Satan was one of these 'sons of God' and qualified as a member of the heavenly court even though he was clearly not a wholehearted supporter of the heavenly government. That tension within the heavenly court also occurs in other places in the Old Testament, even when the figure of Satan does not appear. Of particular interest is the story of Micaiah and the false prophets, told both in 1 Kings 22 and in 2 Chronicles 18. Let us note some of the key features.

As the story is told in 1 Kings (the Chronicles version varies little), Jehoshaphat, king of Judah (the southern kingdom) has gone north to join Ahab, king of Israel (the northern kingdom) in an attempt to regain Ramoth Gilead for Israel from the Syrians. By reputation, Ahab ranks low as a worshiper of the true God, Yahweh, being constantly tempted by his wife's Baal worship. But the biblical writers generally give Jehoshaphat good marks for his efforts in the service of Yahweh. Why Jehoshaphat decided to link up with the ungodly Ahab is a curious matter, but he had done so. Yet having decided to help Ahab, the king's religious scruples began to work on his conscience. 'We need to inquire from Yahweh, first,' he said. 'No problem,' replied Ahab, and he summoned four hundred prophets, all of whom confidently declared 'Yahweh will give Ramoth-Gilead into the hand of the king' (1 Kings 22:6).

These four hundred prophets apparently left Jehoshaphat even more uneasy, so he asked if perchance there might possibly be one more prophet. 'Well, yes, there is Micaiah,' admitted Ahab. 'But I hate him, for he never prophesies good concerning me, but evil.' Jehoshaphat got his wish, though, and Micaiah arrived, amidst a show of convincing visual aids by one of the other prophets- iron horns to push the Syrians (1 Kings 22:11).

With a touch of sarcasm, Micaiah told the king to go ahead (1 Kings 22:15), but Ahab caught the tone and commanded him to tell the truth. Micaiah did just that, confirming Ahab's suspicions as to the nature of Micaiah's prophecies, for he predicted the king's death. For our purposes, however, what is significant is the way that the heavenly court figures in Micaiah's reply. Part of Micaiah's reply is couched in terms of a vision:

'I saw Yahweh sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing beside him on his right hand and on his left, and Yahweh said, "Who will entice Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-Gilead?" And one said one thing, and another said another.' Then a spirit came forward and stood before Yahweh, saying, "I will entice him." And Yahweh said to him, "By what means?" And he said, "I will go forth, and will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets." And he said "You are to so entice him, and you shall succeed; go forth and do so! Now therefore behold, Yahweh has put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these our prophets; Yahweh has spoken evil concerning you' (1 Kings 22:19-23).



The parallel with Job is striking, for though the Lord is still clearly responsible for what happens, the actual performance of the evil deed is carried out by a member of the heavenly court. But, of course, there is a notable difference between the experience of Ahab and that of Job, for Job is a blameless and upright man. Such is hardly the case with Ahab, even though the specific deed which precipitated his downfall is not indicated in connection with Micaiah's vision.

From our point of view, the charade of the heavenly court looking for some way to make Ahab fall seems a strange way for the God of the universe to carry on. But that is the beauty of a vision: God can use whatever imagery is necessary to get the point across in a particular circumstance. For ancient Israel, the scene of the heavenly court was very useful, for it maintained the view of the omnipotence of Yahweh, while allowing some of the deeds to be carried out by lesser members of his entourage. The evil spirit who misleads Ahab is not yet cast in the role of a 'Satan' who is the 'accuser of the brethren,' but the picture is not all that far removed from such a view.

This idea of the heavenly court is used for another purpose in the Old Testament, namely to 'control' the gods of the other nations. It may be difficult for Christian theologians to visualize the gods of the other nations as something more than mere sticks and stones, Yet even in our modern era, conservative Christians can live quite comfortably with a belief in a demonic kingdom, while at the same time viewing all the gods of the pagans as nonexistent. We probably wouldn't be quite so ready to say that the gods of the pagans were evil angels, but the Old Testament view is perhaps close to that point of view. Let us look at some of the key passages.

At the outset we need to recall a suggestion made earlier, namely, that God did not immediately set himself before Israel as the only true God of the universe. There are many passages in the Old Testament that declare that Yahweh is the only God worthy of the name. The creation account in Genesis 1 and numerous psalms declare that there is one God who made the world and all that is therein. But for the average Israelite the problem was faced at a much lower level: 'You shall have no other gods (*Elohim*) before me.' Where do the other gods (*Elohim*) fit in? They are the gods (*Elohim*) of the other nations. Yahweh is the *Elohim* in Israel and for Israel; Dagon is the *Elohim* for Philistia, Chemosh is the *Elohim* for Moab, and so on. The biblical evidence for such a position is not extensive, but when brought together it provides a reasonably clear picture.

One of the most fascinating and pertinent passages is Deuteronomy 32:8-9, rendered in the RSV as follows:

When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of men, he fixed the bounds of the people according to the number of the sons of God. For the LORD's (Yahweh's) portion is his people. Jacob his allotted heritage.

So here is a poetic passage suggesting that Israel (Jacob) belongs to Yahweh, but the other peoples belong to the sons of God. But you will notice a curious footnote in the RSV. The standard Hebrew text which was passed down through the official rabbinical line actually reads, 'he fixed the bounds of the peoples according to the sons of *Israel*,' a reading that makes very little sense and seems rather puzzling. The Septuagint (the Greek Old Testament), however, had

rendered this passage as angels of God, instead of 'sons of Israel', leading a number of scholars to surmise that in the original Hebrew, the phrase 'sons of God (*Elohim*)' had appeared. Apparently the devout and monotheistic scribes could not accept such an interpretation, so they modified the text to read 'sons of Israel.' But when the Dead Sea Scrolls came to light., one of the more sensational discoveries was a portion of a Hebrew manuscript with this passage included. In short, the conjecture of the scholar's who had looked at the Greek Old Testament was correct; the manuscript read 'sons of God.' So the rendering given above by the RSV is most certainly correct and is one of the most helpful passages for establishing the Old Testament concept of the heavenly court.

Moving into narrative portions of the Old Testament, additional passages confirm the view that Israel sometimes saw Yahweh as one of the *Elohim* instead of the supreme and only *Elohim*. Judges 11:24 indicates that Jephthah, one of the judges, held such a view; at least such is indicated by his diplomatic correspondence with the Ammonites 'Will you not possess what Chemosh your *Elohim* gives you to possess? And all that *Yahweh* our *Elohim* has dispossessed before us, we will possess.'

This view is indicated also in the story of David. When he was fleeing from Saul, he had opportunity to kill the king, but settled for his spear and jar of water. When Saul realized what had happened, he and David carried on a moving conversation-across the valley from each other but moving never-the-less. In his appeal to Saul, David makes the following pathetic observation:

If it is *Yahweh* who has stirred you up against me, may he accept an offering; but if it is men, may they be cursed before *Yahweh*, for they have driven me out this day that I should have no share in the heritage of *Yahweh*, saying, 'Go, serve other *Elohim*.' (1 Sam. 26.19).

Driving David out of the land of Israel was tantamount to saying: 'Go serve other *Elohim*. You are no longer in *Yahweh*'s land.'

Further hints of this view of the heavenly court appear in a most curious story in 2 Kings 3. The story describes Israel's attack against Moab. Moab was on the run as Israel pursued them right into Moab itself. In fact, circumstances had become so bleak for the Moabites that their king felt constrained to do something drastic: sacrifice the crown prince, his eldest son. When Israel saw this sacrifice taking place, they apparently recognized that here was *the* supreme sacrifice that a king could make to Chemosh. But note the strange way that the biblical writer has recorded the story for us:

Then he took his eldest son who was to reign in his stead, and offered him for a burnt offering upon the wall. And there came great wrath on Israel and they withdrew up from him and returned to their own land (2 Kings 3:27).

The biblical writer is apparently afraid to admit that Israel had granted any kind of power to Chemosh, yet he does tell us that the army hastened back to their own land. When we put this story alongside the other passages in the Old Testament which touch on the *Elohim*, the conclusion becomes clear that Israel's army was not at all sure that *Yahweh* was with them on

foreign soil. Yahweh was *Elohim* in Israel, but was he also *Elohim* in Moab? They weren't taking any chances and headed for home.

Another story which has a bearing on the discussion is that of Naaman in 2 Kings 5. Naaman apparently felt that it was necessary to travel to Israel if he was to be healed by Israel's God. His testimony after his healing is remarkable, both with respect to the claims that he makes for Yahweh and for the parallel but somewhat contradictory recognition that back home in Syria Yahweh was not really in charge:

'Behold I know that there is no *Elohim* in all the earth but in Israel; so accept now a present from your servant.' But he said, 'As *Yahweh* lives, whom I serve, I will receive none.' And he urged him to take it, but he refused. Then Naaman said, 'If not, I pray you, let there be given to your servant two mules' burden of earth; for henceforth your servant will not offer burnt offering or sacrifice to any *Elohim* but *Yahweh*. In this matter may *Yahweh* pardon your servant: when my master goes into the house of Rimmon to worship there, leaning on my arm,, and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon, when I bow myself in the house of Rimmon, *Yahweh* pardon your servant in this matter.' He said to him, 'Go in peace' (2 Kings 5:15-19).

Yahweh is the only true *Elohim*, but he is still the *Elohim* of Israel. Hence, some of Israel's land must be taken to Syria so that Naaman can worship Israel's *Elohim* properly, on Israel's land.

Still further evidence for the heavenly court comes from the book of Daniel. Daniel 10 describes how Daniel prayed for divine assistance. The angelic response was delayed because 'the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days; but Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, so I left him there with the prince of the kingdom of Persia' (Daniel 10:13). Daniel 10:20-21 also mentions the 'prince of Persia,' who will be followed by the 'prince of Greece.' Furthermore, Michael 'your prince contends by my side against these.' Now without the other evidence for the concept of the heavenly court in the Old Testament, one might be tempted to see these princes as mere human rulers. Yet the figure of Michael seems to suggest that we are, in fact, dealing with the supernatural. If that is the case, then the book of Daniel also reflects the concept of the heavenly court: Michael and Gabriel on Daniel's side against the Prince of Persia and the Prince of Greece. The tensions are deeper here, approaching the full break as seen in New Testament times, but the interesting thing from the standpoint of the heavenly court is the fact that each nation has its prince.

The crowning piece of evidence for the concept of the heavenly court is provided by Psalm 82. Without the concept of the heavenly court, the psalm is quite inexplicable, but when set against the background of the heavenly court it can be seen as a significant step towards the position which is so important to Christians, namely, that there is really only one *Elohim* worthy of the name, and that is Yahweh, the God of Israel.

This psalm is one of the best places to see the dual usage of *Elohim* as singular and as plural, for the psalm begins: 'God (*Elohim*) has taken his place in the divine council; in the midst of the gods (*Elohim*) he holds judgment' (Ps. 82:1). God then proceeds to condemn roundly these *Elohim* for failing to establish justice. They have judged unjustly, showing partiality to the wicked and failing to give justice to the weak, the fatherless, the afflicted and destitute. Then in

a glorious climax which prepared the way for the exaltation of the one true God, the psalmist quotes his God: "I say, You, are gods, sons of the Most High, all of you; nevertheless you shall die like men, and fall like any prince" (Ps. 82:6-7).

So the reluctant members, the unjust members, the 'satans' in the heavenly court, are finally brought to justice for their failures. What then is the only conclusion that can be drawn? In the words of the psalmist: 'Arise, O God, judge the earth; for to thee belong all the nations!' (Ps. 82:8).

No longer will Naaman have to haul his mule loads of Israelite soil to worship the one true God. Cast down are Chemosh, Dagon, and Rimmon. Vanquished are the princes of Persia and Greece, for there is one God to whom all the nations belong, the God of Israel. That, of course, is a sentiment with which Christians would most heartily agree. Although the demonic is present in the world, there is one God who is over all, above all, and the creator of all that is.

Why did it take so long for Israel to see the truth? And why did God not make it clear all along? The answer lies in the character of our God. A freedom-loving God must grant his creatures the right to rebel. Furthermore, he must allow the principle of selfishness to manifest itself clearly if righteousness is ever to gain the upper hand. As God led Israel along the path of restoration, he sought to win the hearts and minds of his people. In a world permeated with polytheism, convincing Israel that there is one true God in heaven who is God over all was no easy task and the route may seem to us to have been circuitous. But as Israel grew towards the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, the principles of the great cosmic struggle began to emerge more clearly, until finally in the New Testament the issues and the key protagonists stood out in bold relief for all to see.

Nor should we overlook the significance of that New Testament climax as it is so vividly described in Revelation 12. The war in heaven and the thrusting out of the dragon is often seen only in its primeval significance, but the book of Revelation clearly sees the struggle climaxing at the cross. As the Devil is cast down to the earth a loud voice in heaven proclaims:

"Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death" (Rev. 12:10-11).

The cosmic struggle may have been of long standing, but regardless of when the war in heaven began, it was won at the cross. Though the skirmishes on earth must continue (cf. Rev. 12:12), the heavenly court has been purified and is now composed solely of Michael and his angels. The banished accuser is no longer one of the "sons of God." Thus, in a sense, Revelation 12 marks the transition between the Old Testament concept of the heavenly court and the New Testament portrayal of the battle between Christ and Satan, the great struggle for the hearts and lives of men – for the rulership of this world and the universe.

**Theme: The Great Controversy**

**Leading Question:** Why would God Almighty allow created beings to challenge his authority?

In my years of teaching, I have found that Job, probably more than any other book in the Bible, divides my students. Some really like the book and some really don't. A partial explanation lies in the fact that Adventists stand "officially" in the free-will tradition (Arminian, Wesleyan) as over against the Calvinist tradition which emphasizes divine sovereignty. Only those who support a free-will approach heartily endorse the idea of created beings challenging divine authority. In Adventist theology this idea of creatures challenging the Creator goes under the heading of "The Great Controversy."

Now while Adventists are "officially" Arminian/Wesleyan, many Adventists still cherish Calvinist ideas. I once told David Neff, former SDA and editor of *Christianity Today* for many years, that, from my perspective, free-will parents often give birth to Calvinist children and Calvinist parents often give birth to free-will children. He laughed and noted that one of his daughters had recently reacted with surprise and horror when she learned that her father believed in pre-destination. "It's a mild form of predestination," said Neff, "but it is predestination. And you would think that she would have understood because we sent her to a Calvinist high school."

During the year that I was an exchange teacher at Seminar Marienhoehe, in Darmstadt, Germany, at that time the Adventist seminary for what was then West Germany, the Sabbath School lessons were on the book of Job. Many of the ministerial students came back from their visits to the German Adventist churches reporting some of the members didn't think we should be studying the book of Job because "no one should talk back to God the way Satan talked back to God!" These devout people would never take Job out of their Bibles, but they didn't like the book very much.

**Question:** What dramatic slippage between the divine ideal and earthly reality is revealed in Job 1:1-12? Is God treating Job "fairly" here?

**Question:** What kind of God would deliver his faithful servant over to Satan to be tormented and tried as described in the prologue of Job?

**Note:** Behind the scenes in Job 1 lies the crucial issue of whether there is such a thing as genuine morality, such a thing as "disinterested benevolence." Satan claimed that Job worshiped God because God had bribed him. God insisted that Job was a man of integrity, one who would serve him faithfully even if his world were to fall apart.

The essence of "the great controversy" is captured in these lines from C. S. Lewis' *Screwtape Letters*, a book in which everything is turned on its head, with God being the enemy and the human the "patient," the pawn between Satan and God:

“He wants them to learn to walk and must therefore take away His hand; and if only the will to walk is really there He is pleased even with their stumbles. Do not be deceived, Wormwood. Our cause is never more in danger than when a human, no longer desiring, but still intending, to do our Enemy's will, looks round upon a universe from which every trace of Him seems to have vanished, and asks why he has been forsaken, and still obeys.” – C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, p. 39

Because God wants a world where his creatures worship him freely, not by coercion, God allows his way to be challenged, so that in the end, the way of love can be seen to be the best way. The final paragraphs from Ellen White's *The Great Controversy*, capture the vision:

And the years of eternity, as they roll, will bring richer and still more glorious revelations of God and of Christ. As knowledge is progressive, so will love, reverence, and happiness increase. The more men learn of God, the greater will be their admiration of His character. As Jesus opens before them the riches of redemption and the amazing achievements in the great controversy with Satan, the hearts of the ransomed thrill with more fervent devotion, and with more rapturous joy they sweep the harps of gold; and ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands of voices unite to swell the mighty chorus of praise. {GC 678.1}

“And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.” Revelation 5:13. {GC 678.2}

The great controversy is ended. Sin and sinners are no more. The entire universe is clean. One pulse of harmony and gladness beats through the vast creation. From Him who created all, flow life and light and gladness, throughout the realms of illimitable space. From the minutest atom to the greatest world, all things, animate and inanimate, in their unshadowed beauty and perfect joy, declare that God is love. {GC 678.3}

**Question:** According to Revelation 12:7-12, what is the turning point in the great conflict?

**Note:** Many Christians who are aware of the war in heaven think of Satan's fall as taking place during the primeval history of the world. But according to Revelation 12:7-12, the *real* fall took place at the cross. At the cross, the crucial issue becomes clear: The principle of selfishness, embodied in Satan's rebellion is so vile that it would even destroy God. But the principle of love, embodied in the plan of redemption, is so powerful that God would even be willing to die. And so God took human flesh so that he could die on our behalf. A key line from Ellen White's *The Desire of Ages* puts it this way: “At the cross of Calvary, love and selfishness stood face to face. Here was their crowning manifestation.” – Ellen White, *The Desire of Ages*, 57

In the book of Job, the conflict focuses on one man. But that man typifies what must happen within the entire universe: God's people by their loyalty, ensure the stability of the law of love throughout all eternity.

**Theme: “Doth Job Fear God for Nought?”**

**Leading Question:** Is Satan’s attack on Job typical of his methods in dealing with humans?

The title for this week’s lesson is simply a sneer from Satan as he talks about Job’s apparent morality: “Does Job fear God for nought?” His intention is to prove that Job’s apparent morality is nothing more than a bribe as a result of God’s material blessings. But for God’s goal in the “Great Controversy” to be successfully met, he needs people who will freely and willingly submit to any kind of test in order to prove that their love for God and for the good is genuine.

In short, the kind of test through which Satan took Job is particularly villainous and quite unfair. But to use an image from sports, the only way a coach can prove that his kids can swim is to dump them in the water. Rhetoric by itself just doesn’t cut it.

This kind of attack, however, is not the only weapon in the devil’s arsenal. This week’s lesson allows us to glimpse a variety of victims and a variety of satanic methods as he seeks to destroy God and God’s good creation. In particular we will look more closely at Adam and Eve in Eden, at Job’s wife, and at Jesus’ temptations in the wilderness, noting similarities and differences with reference to Job’s experience.

### **In the Garden**

**Question:** How did Adam and Eve’s temptation in the Garden differ from Job’s trials? How do the two different approaches compare with those that confront us?

1. **Disguised villain or an invisible one?** In the garden, Satan was fully present, though disguised as a serpent. In Job, no satanic figure appears to Job at all. The Tempter is entirely invisible. For us, which would be more difficult to resist?
2. **Conversation or silence?** In the Garden, Satan lures his victims with subtle attacks against God and insinuating suggestions. In Job, there is no misleading story line. The heavens are as brass. When Job cries out for an answer, he hears nothing – until the very end. Which would be more difficult to endure for us? Are not our temptations more like Job’s?
3. **A final examination?** In the Garden, our first parents don’t realize that they were being put to the test. They simply slipped into the examination unawares. In Job, the disasters came without comment. But after the dust had settled, God appeared in the storm and confronted Job with a real examination, one which Job flunked. His score? Zero out of eighty-eight. Of the two methods, which would be a better test of one’s loyalty? Today, we do not often have the privilege of flunking God’s exam as openly as Job did. So is our narrative more like that in the garden or like that in Job?

## Job's Wife

**Question:** To what extent did Satan directly attack Job's wife? Is her situation at all like ours?

**Innocent bystander vs. the one directly attacked.** In Job, the primary object of Satan's wrath was Job. In fact, the only place where his wife comes to view is in 2:9 and 10. She speaks all of two sentences to Job and he two sentences to her:

9. His wife said to him, "Are you still maintaining your integrity? Curse God and die!"<sup>10</sup> He replied, "You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?"

The narrator in Job adds: "In all this, Job did not sin in what he said."

The context is tantalizing because the stakes raised by the use of the word "curse." The Hebrew word translated as "curse" also can be translated as "bless." Thus one could translate the wife's response as: "Bless God and die!"

Does all this possibly suggest that she was simply a devout woman who was asking Job to recognize the realities of a cruel world, speak one final blessing, then die? Virtually all commentaries paint her as a villain. But note that Job is right on the verge of abandoning his stoic acceptance. In 3:1 Job "opened his mouth and cursed the day of his birth." He didn't curse God directly, but cursed the day of his birth.

Is it significant that Job's wife is never named? Three of his new daughters at the end of the book receive names (that's more than the original three) and Job's wife is never mentioned in the restoration. Was she the mother of all 20 of Job's children? Scripture does not say.

**Question:** How often are we called upon to speak a word of "encouragement" to someone who is suffering from multiple attacks? To what extent is this a subtle temptation from Satan?

## Jesus in the Wilderness

**Question:** To what extent do Jesus' temptations in the wilderness mirror our own in the on-going tussle with Satan?

In the wilderness temptation scene recorded in both Matthew 4 and Luke 4, Satan confronts Jesus with three separate temptations. Though Matthew and Luke switch the order of the second and third temptations, the essence of each temptation is the same. But given the focus of this lesson on Job, it would be helpful to ask how the mode of confrontation and the content of each temptation parallels our own.

Though the first temptation involves appetite and food, the root of the first temptation is more deeply tied to Jesus' self-consciousness as the Lord's Messiah. Forty days earlier Jesus had come from his baptism with the words of affirmation spoken there: "This is my Son" (Matt. 3:17). Will he be able to remember his calling in the light of Satan's attack? For us, turning stones to bread is not a temptation. It is an impossibility. For Jesus, it was a real temptation to



“test” his status. Would he be able to perform such a miracle? Yet he stood firm.

Reasoning from my own experience, the first of the three is the only one that I can imagine being a real temptation for Jesus. The second one (in Matthew) the challenge to throw himself down is buttressed by a quotation from Scripture. But I cannot imagine how this temptation would have any appeal for Jesus. Similarly the temptation to bow down and worship Satan would seem to be even more far-fetched.

But for ordinary mortals, the three temptations could take quite different forms. We are forever being tempted to manipulate power to our own advantage (rocks to bread), we are always at risk from presumption, placing ourselves where we should not be in hope that God will deliver us (jump from the temple), and to “worship” the forces of evil by our devious motives, even though we probably would be horrified if we could recognize that we were actually worshipping Satan.

To sum up, if one compares the four different modes of satanic attack that have been raised in this lesson, it gives us plenty of room for personal application. These are the four:

**Adam and Eve in the Garden.**

**Job.**

**Job’s wife.**

**Jesus in the wilderness.**

Since most of us rarely encounter Satan in a personal form, Job and Job’s wife are the ones with the most likely parallels to our experience. For Job, there is no evidence that he was aware of the role of Satan in his sufferings. His world looked just like ours when tragedy strikes. For Job’s wife, the application would be tantalizingly cryptic. In terms of Satan’s intention, she would appear to be a collateral figure. She was near the one under attack. Did she encourage Job or not? “Perhaps” may be the best answer we can give. Still, the personal application is available to us. When anyone is under attack, we have the opportunity of encouraging and supporting. We don’t have to attack as did Job’s friends.

**Theme: God and Human Suffering**

**Leading Question:** If all we had was the book of Job, what would it tell us about God and human suffering?

Without the rest of Scripture, Job tells us little about God and human suffering. Yet the book plays a crucial role in the story. The Adventist perspective is shaped by a free-will theology that highlights both the role of the human and the divine as God seeks to work with fallen humankind. The Sabbath School discussion could evaluate the role of each of the following passages in illuminating the topic of “God and Human Suffering.”

**The Framework**

**1. Genesis 3: Deception in the garden.** In Genesis 3, the human story is shaped by the role of Satan, disguised as a serpent, an identification not explicit until Revelation 12:7-12.

**2. War in heaven, climaxing at the cross.** In Revelation 12:7-12, the war in heaven is seen to climax at the cross. Thereafter Satan is excluded from the heavenly realm:

7 And war broke out in heaven; Michael and his angels fought against the dragon. The dragon and his angels fought back, 8 but they were defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. 9 The great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. 10 Then I heard a loud voice in heaven, proclaiming,

“Now have come the salvation and the power  
and the kingdom of our God  
and the authority of his Messiah,  
for the accuser of our comrades has been thrown down,  
who accuses them day and night before our God.  
11 But they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb  
and by the word of their testimony,  
for they did not cling to life even in the face of death.  
12 Rejoice then, you heavens  
and those who dwell in them!  
But woe to the earth and the sea,  
for the devil has come down to you  
with great wrath,  
because he knows that his time is short!”

## From the Garden to the Cross to a New Earth

**3. Genesis 22: Sacrifice of Isaac.** Genesis 22 depicts the twisted impact of sin on human attitudes toward divine authority: the ultimate demand of the gods is seen to be the sacrifice of the first born. God worked within that catastrophic situation to show that he will provide the sacrifice; humans cannot sacrifice their offspring to satisfy an angry God.

**4. Job: An innocent man mercilessly tormented by Satan.** God is seen as the one responsible for turning Satan loose on Job. The goal seems to have been to show that human beings are indeed capable of unselfish love in the service of the God they worship.

**5. Arrogance among heavenly beings.** Although Isaiah 14:12-15 (the fall of Lucifer) and Ezekiel 28:12-19 (the guardian cherub from Eden) were not explicitly linked with Satan until well into the Christian era, these two narratives do reveal a tension between created beings and God on high, with the sin of pride being prominent in both passages.

**6. Micah 6:6-8: What does God require?** The classic prophetic passage on the human pay-back psychology shows how the human mind keeps imagining an ever higher price in order to gain peace with God. The Good News Translation actually adds an explicit “no” to clarify the implied negative in the passage:

6 What shall I bring to the Lord, the God of heaven, when I come to worship him? Shall I bring the best calves to burn as offerings to him? 7 Will the Lord be pleased if I bring him thousands of sheep or endless streams of olive oil? Shall I offer him my first-born child to pay for my sins? 8 No, the Lord has told us what is good. What he requires of us is this: to do what is just, to show constant love, and to live in humble fellowship with our God.

In short, God does not demand that a price be paid, but fallen sinners imagine that such a price must be paid. The sacrifice of Christ illustrates the divine intent to satisfy that felt need.

**7. Philippians 2:1-11 (5-11): Divine example of selflessness.** The crucial illustration of selfless divine love is provided by the second chapter of Philippians. Though the classic passage is usually given as verses 5-11, the introductory verses provide the setting of divine selflessness:

1. If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, 2 make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. 3 Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. 4 Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. 5 Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, 7 but emptied himself,

taking the form of a slave,  
being born in human likeness.  
And being found in human form,  
8 he humbled himself  
and became obedient to the point of death—  
even death on a cross.  
9 Therefore God also highly exalted him  
and gave him the name  
that is above every name,  
10 so that at the name of Jesus  
every knee should bend,  
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,  
11 and every tongue should confess  
that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
to the glory of God the Father. (NRSV)

**8. Revelation 21:1-4: God dwells among his people forever.** Ultimately, God will establish a pain-free world where he will be present with his people forever. That’s the goal of the great struggle between good and evil, the “Cosmic Conflict,” or what Adventists have called, “The Great Controversy” between Christ and Satan.

A quotation from *The Desire of Ages* and one from the renowned New Testament scholar, John Stott, both focus on the role that Jesus Christ played in the cosmic drama.

**Ellen White:** “At the cross of Calvary, love and selfishness stood face to face. Here was their crowning manifestation.” *The Desire of Ages*, p. 57

**John Stott:** “I could never myself believe in God, if it were not for the cross. The only God I believe in is the One Nietzsche ridiculed as ‘God on the cross.’ In the real world of pain, how could one worship a God who was immune to it? I have entered many Buddhist temples in different Asian countries and stood respectfully before the statue of the Buddha, his legs crossed, arms folded, eyes closed, the ghost of a smile playing round his mouth, a remote look on his face, detached from the agonies of the world. But each time after a while I have had to turn away. And in imagination I have turned instead to that lonely, twisted, tortured figure on the cross, nails through hands and feet, back lacerated, limbs wrenched, brow bleeding from thorn-pricks, mouth dry and intolerably thirsty, plunged in Godforsaken darkness. That is the God for me! He laid aside his immunity to pain. He entered our world of flesh and blood, tears and death. He suffered for us. Our sufferings become more manageable in the light of his. There is still a question mark against human suffering, but over it we boldly stamp another mark, the cross that symbolizes divine suffering. ‘The cross of Christ ... is God’s only self-justification in such a world’ [P. T. Forsyth] as ours....” – *The Cross of Christ*, Inter-Varsity Fellowship, 1986, 2006 (pp. 326-27).

**Theme: Curse the Day**

**Leading Question:** Is God willing to listen to Christians who are so discouraged that they curse the day of their birth?

Among devout believers, discouragement and depression are some of the most difficult mental states to address. After all, we know Jesus. So cheer up! In *Steps to Christ* Ellen White wrote, “Make it a rule never to utter one word of doubt or discouragement” (p. 119). And the New Testament doesn’t let us off any easier: “Rejoice in the Lord always,” exclaims Paul, “and again I say rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.” (Phil. 4:4-6, NRSV)

Does Job give us permission to be discouraged? This week’s lesson gives us the chance to look long and hard at discouragement and depression. Our goal must also be to rejoice. But rejoicing on command is as difficult as laughing or crying demand. It cannot be done.

So beginning with Job 3, let’s focus on the shadow side of our experience, looking at Job, Elijah, the Psalmist, Jeremiah, Jesus, and Ellen White. The key passages are reproduced below:

**Job: Cursing the day of his birth** (Job 3:1-17, NRSV)

1 After this Job opened his mouth and cursed the day of his birth. 2 Job said:

3 “Let the day perish in which I was born,  
and the night that said,  
‘A man-child is conceived.’

4 Let that day be darkness!  
May God above not seek it,  
or light shine on it.

5 Let gloom and deep darkness claim it.  
Let clouds settle upon it;  
let the blackness of the day terrify it.

6 That night—let thick darkness seize it!  
let it not rejoice among the days of the year;  
let it not come into the number of the months.

7 Yes, let that night be barren;  
let no joyful cry be heard[a] in it.

8 Let those curse it who curse the Sea,[b]  
those who are skilled to rouse up Leviathan.

9 Let the stars of its dawn be dark;  
let it hope for light, but have none;  
may it not see the eyelids of the morning—

10 because it did not shut the doors of my mother's womb,  
 and hide trouble from my eyes.  
 11 "Why did I not die at birth,  
 come forth from the womb and expire?  
 12 Why were there knees to receive me,  
 or breasts for me to suck?  
 13 Now I would be lying down and quiet;  
 I would be asleep; then I would be at rest  
 14 with kings and counselors of the earth  
 who rebuild ruins for themselves,  
 15 or with princes who have gold,  
 who fill their houses with silver.  
 16 Or why was I not buried like a stillborn child,  
 like an infant that never sees the light?  
 17 There the wicked cease from troubling,  
 and there the weary are at rest.

**Elijah: Wishing that he might die** (1 Kings 19:1-9, NRSV)/

19:1 Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. 2 Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, "So may the gods do to me, and more also, if I do not make your life like the life of one of them by this time tomorrow." 3 Then he was afraid; he got up and fled for his life, and came to Beer-sheba, which belongs to Judah; he left his servant there.

4 But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a solitary broom tree. He asked that he might die: "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my ancestors." 5 Then he lay down under the broom tree and fell asleep. Suddenly an angel touched him and said to him, "Get up and eat." 6 He looked, and there at his head was a cake baked on hot stones, and a jar of water. He ate and drank, and lay down again. 7 The angel of the Lord came a second time, touched him, and said, "Get up and eat, otherwise the journey will be too much for you." 8 He got up, and ate and drank; then he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb the mount of God. 9 At that place he came to a cave, and spent the night there.

Then the word of the Lord came to him, saying, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

**Psalms 88: "Darkness is my closest friend"** (NRSV)

**Note:** Almost half the psalms are laments. Most of them descend into the depths, but then return to the light at the end. Psalm 88 is the most notable exception to that pattern. It is a testimony to misery that stays down in the depths to the very end:

Psalm 88:1 O Lord, God of my salvation,  
 when, at night, I cry out in your presence,  
 2 let my prayer come before you;

incline your ear to my cry.  
 3 For my soul is full of troubles,  
 and my life draws near to Sheol.  
 4 I am counted among those who go down to the Pit;  
 I am like those who have no help,  
 5 like those forsaken among the dead,  
 like the slain that lie in the grave,  
 like those whom you remember no more,  
 for they are cut off from your hand.  
 6 You have put me in the depths of the Pit,  
 in the regions dark and deep.  
 7 Your wrath lies heavy upon me,  
 and you overwhelm me with all your waves. Selah  
 8 You have caused my companions to shun me;  
 you have made me a thing of horror to them.  
 I am shut in so that I cannot escape;  
 9 my eye grows dim through sorrow.  
 Every day I call on you, O Lord;  
 I spread out my hands to you.  
 10 Do you work wonders for the dead?  
 Do the shades rise up to praise you? Selah  
 11 Is your steadfast love declared in the grave,  
 or your faithfulness in Abaddon?  
 12 Are your wonders known in the darkness,  
 or your saving help in the land of forgetfulness?  
 13 But I, O Lord, cry out to you;  
 in the morning my prayer comes before you.  
 14 O Lord, why do you cast me off?  
 Why do you hide your face from me?  
 15 Wretched and close to death from my youth up,  
 I suffer your terrors; I am desperate.  
 16 Your wrath has swept over me;  
 your dread assaults destroy me.  
 17 They surround me like a flood all day long;  
 from all sides they close in on me.  
 18 You have caused friend and neighbor to shun me;  
 my companions are in darkness.

**Jeremiah: “Wishing that my mother’s womb would be forever great” (Jer. 20:14-18, NRSV)**

**Note:** In Jeremiah’s so-called confessions, he bares his soul in despair. This following segment is one of the more vivid images, recalling the words of Job;

Jeremiah 20:14 Cursed be the day  
on which I was born!  
The day when my mother bore me,  
let it not be blessed!  
15 Cursed be the man  
who brought the news to my father, saying,  
“A child is born to you, a son,”  
making him very glad.  
16 Let that man be like the cities  
that the Lord overthrew without pity;  
let him hear a cry in the morning  
and an alarm at noon,  
17 because he did not kill me in the womb;  
so my mother would have been my grave,  
and her womb forever great.  
18 Why did I come forth from the womb  
to see toil and sorrow,  
and spend my days in shame?

**Jesus: “Why have you forsaken me?”** (Matt. 27:46, quoting Psalm 22:1, NRSV)

**Note:** Jesus’ cry of godforsakenness is a quote from Psalm 22, another lament psalm, but one which breaks out in to the sunlight at the end:

Matthew 27:46 And about three o’clock Jesus cried with a loud voice, “*Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?*” that is, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

**Ellen White: “Many times the wish arose that I had never been born”** (1T 25)

**Note:** In her autobiography in the first volume of *The Testimonies to the Church*, Ellen White twice expresses the ultimate despair. The first one is triggered by the dark shadow of the belief in an eternally burning hell. In this case, accepting the belief in the non-immortality of the soul may have saved her from the insane asylum. But until that happened, she had come to the point where she said she wished she had not been born.

The second cry of despair came later in her experience when she felt overwhelmed by the responsibilities of her calling and believed that God had forsaken her. Both quotations are cited below:

**Testimonies 1:25** “I thought that the fate of the condemned sinner would be mine, to endure the flames of hell forever, even as long as God Himself existed. This impression deepened upon my mind until I feared that I would lose my reason. I would look upon the dumb beasts with envy, because they had no soul to be punished after death. Many times the wish arose that I had never been born.”



**Testimonies 1:63** “I coveted death as a release from the responsibilities that were crowding upon me. At length the sweet peace I had so long enjoyed left me, and despair again pressed upon my soul. My prayers all seemed vain, and my faith was gone. Words of comfort, reproof, or encouragement were alike to me; for it seemed that no one could understand me but God, and He had forsaken me. The company of believers in Portland were ignorant concerning the exercises of my mind that had brought me into this state of despondency; but they knew that for some reason my mind had become depressed, and they felt (63/64) that this was sinful on my part, considering the gracious manner in which the Lord had manifested Himself to me.

I feared that God had taken His favor from me forever. As I thought of the light that had formerly blessed my soul, it seemed doubly precious in contrast with the darkness that now enveloped me. Meetings were held at my father's house, but my distress of mind was so great that I did not attend them for some time. My burden grew heavier until the agony of my spirit seemed more than I could bear.”

**Discussion:** In the light of the quotations from Scripture, namely, the words of Job, Elijah, the Psalmist, Jeremiah, and Jesus, and in light of Ellen White’s experience, how should a Christian address the question of depression in one’s own life and in the lives of those close to us?

**Note:** Ellen White’s comments on Elijah can be instructive in this connection:

“Into the experience of all there come times of keen disappointment and utter discouragement – days when sorrow is the portion, and it is hard to believe that God is still the kind benefactor of His earthborn children; days when troubles harass the soul, till death seems preferable to life. It is then that many lose their hold on God and are brought into the slavery of doubt, the bondage of unbelief. Could we at such times discern with spiritual insight the meaning of God's providences we should see angels seeking to save us from ourselves, striving to plant our feet upon a foundation more firm than the everlasting hills, and new faith, new life, would spring into being.” *Prophets and Kings*, 162

Later in the same chapter, however, Ellen White reminds us of the ideal with these strong words:

“Hope and courage are essential to perfect service for God. These are the fruit of faith. Despondency is sinful and unreasonable. God is able and willing ‘more abundantly’ (Hebrews 6:17) to bestow upon His servants the strength they need for test and trial. The plans of the enemies of His work may seem to be well laid and firmly established, but God can overthrow the strongest of these. And this He does in His own time and way, when He sees that the faith of His servants has been sufficiently tested.” – PK 164

**Final question:** How should we deal with depression?

**Theme: The Curse Causeless**

**Leading Question: Can the words of Scripture be useful, even when they are taken out of context?**

This week's lesson focuses on the "encouraging" words spoken by Job's friends. When they heard of his troubles, they came to visit him, and were so amazed that they were speechless for seven days. Given Job's reaction to their "encouraging" words, it probably would have been wise for them to remain silent much longer!

Nevertheless, for this week's discussion, the official Sabbath School Bible Study Guide focuses on Eliphaz's response in Job 4 and 5. In the context of the book of Job, the words of the friends were not at all helpful. But the official Sabbath School Bible Study Guide states: "Not all that Eliphaz is saying here is wrong. Many of these same thoughts are echoed in other parts of the Bible." To make the point, the Study Guide (Wednesday, November 2) cites no less than eight biblical passages which "reflect the sentiments expressed in Job 5" (cited below from NIV):

**Ps. 37:10:** "A little while, and the wicked will be no more; though you look for them, they will not be found."

**Prov. 26:2:** "Like a fluttering sparrow or a darting swallow, an undeserved curse does not come to rest."

**Luke 1:52:** "He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble."

**1 Cor. 3:19:** "For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight. As it is written: 'He catches the wise in their craftiness'" [the words of Eliphaz from Job 5:13].

**Ps. 34:6:** "This poor man called, and the Lord heard him; he saved him out of all his troubles."

**Heb. 12:5:** "And have you completely forgotten this word of encouragement that addresses you as a father addresses his son? It says, 'My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you'" [citing Prov. 3:11].

**Note:** The official Study Guide only cites Hebrews 12:5, a quotation from Proverbs 3:11. But, interestingly enough, the very next verse in Hebrews 12 (verse 6) goes on to quote the next verse in Proverbs 3, namely, Proverbs 3:12, which is a citation modeled on the Greek OT (Septuagint) rather than the Hebrew: "because the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son." The last line of Proverbs 3:12 reads in the Hebrew: "as a father the son he delights in."

**Hos. 6:1:** "Come, let us return to the Lord. He has torn us to pieces but he will heal us; he has injured us but he will bind up our wounds."

**Ps. 33:19:** [18: “But the eyes of the Lord are on those who fear him, on those whose hope is in his unfailing love] 19 to deliver them from death and keep them alive in famine.” **Note:** The Study Guide cites only vs. 19; vs. 18 completes the context indicating that the Lord is the one who delivers.

**Note:** The official Study Guide is quite right in noting Eliphaz’s crass insensitivity in his response to Job:

“Perhaps a good opening for a book on grief counseling could feature Eliphaz here. The opening chapter could have been titled, ‘What not to Say to a Grieving Soul.’ Though obviously these men sympathized with Job, that sympathy went only so far. It seems that for Eliphaz, theological purity was more important than basic consolation. It’s hard to imagine someone coming up to a person going through all that Job was going through and saying, basically, *Well, you must have deserved it, because God is just, and only the wicked suffer like this.*

Even if one thought that this was the situation in Job’s case, what good did it do to say it to him? Suppose a speeding driver got into a car accident and lost his entire family. Can you imagine someone going up to him right away, amid his grief, and saying to him right away: *God is punishing you for your speeding?* The problem with Eliphaz’s word isn’t just the questionable theology; the bigger issue is his insensitivity to Job and all that he is going through.” [comments for Monday, October 31, 2016]

In the comments for Tuesday, October 30, the Study Guide has this comment:

“What Eliphaz heard in ‘visions of the night’ was in many ways very sound theology (see Ps. 103:14; Isa. 64:7; Rom. 3:19, 20). We as humans are clay, we are so temporary, and we can be crushed as easily as a moth. And, of course, what man or woman can be more righteous than God”

But could we not say, at least in an ideal sense, that “sound theology” is only sound when it takes real people into account? Maybe we could even say that there is no “sound theology” apart from the needs of real people? That would be the point of Jesus’ one-line summary of the “law and the prophets: “In everything, do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets” (Matt. 7:12, NRSV). Words can kill. Only when they are massaged into place by a tender and loving heart can they really be “true.” That would seem to be the thrust of Ellen White’s comments to A. T. Jones in 6T 122-123:

“The influence of your teaching would be tenfold greater if you were careful of your words. Words that should be a savor of life unto life may by the spirit which accompanies them be made a savor of death unto death. And remember that if by your spirit or your words you close the door to even one soul, that soul will confront you in the judgment.

Do not, when referring to the Testimonies, feel it your duty to drive them home. In reading the Testimonies be sure not to mix in your filling of words, for this makes

(122/123) it impossible for the hearers to distinguish between the word of the Lord to them and your words. Be sure that you do not make the word of the Lord offensive. We long to see reforms, and because we do not see that which we desire, an evil spirit is too often allowed to cast drops of gall into our cup, and thus others are embittered. By our ill-advised words their spirit is chafed, and they are stirred to rebellion.

Every sermon you preach, every article you write, may be all true; but one drop of gall in it will be poison to the hearer or the reader. Because of that drop of poison, one will discard all your good and acceptable words. Another will feed on the poison; for he loves such harsh words; he follows your example, and talks just as you talk. Thus the evil is multiplied.

Those who present the eternal principles of truth need the holy oil emptied from the two olive branches into the heart. This will flow forth in words that will reform, but not exasperate. The truth is to be spoken in love. Then the Lord Jesus by His Spirit will supply the force and the power. That is His work.” – *Testimonies*, 6:122-123

But it is in that connection that we must be extremely careful when we talk about what is “true” in the abstract sense but deadly in the practical sense. EGW seems to be addressing that point when she says “every sermon you preach, every article you write, may be all true; but one drop of gall in it will be poison to the hearer or the reader.” In the same way we could say that much of what Eliphaz said was “true” in the abstract sense. But there was more than just one drop of gall in Eliphaz’s speech. In spite of whatever “truth” these friends may have spoken – and it is usually the friends who get quoted in church, not the strident words of Job – in the end, it was the friends whom God told to repent. In fact, the Lord was angry with them. Here is the quote from the book of Job itself after God had given Job the examination in which Job scored zero out of eighty-eight: “After the Lord had said these things to Job, he said to Eliphaz the Temanite, ‘I am angry with you and your two friends, because you have not spoken the truth about me, as my servant Job has’” (Job 42:7).

**Additional comment about context:** After emphasizing the importance of “context” in applying the words of truth, we must note that inspired writers frequently ignore the literary context when they cite Scripture. Following the practices of ancient midrash, the New Testament writers often quote passages out of context. The books of Matthew, John, and Hebrews are particularly noteworthy in that respect. From a modern technical sense, every OT passage quoted in Hebrews 1 and 2 is cited “out of context.”

And that habit continues today. In last week’s lesson, this study guide referred to the experience of Elijah, quoting Ellen White from *Prophets and Kings*. In that chapter she links the story of Job’s discouragement with that of Elijah, the same linkage made in this study guide. But in doing so she actually quotes the words of Zophar as being words of “encouragement” to Job. She does not tell us that they came from Zophar. In fact, she adroitly introduces them in this way: “But though weary of life, Job was not allowed to die. To him were pointed out the possibilities of the future, and there was given him the message of hope.” Then she quotes these words, given here with Massoretic-like precision, with her spelling [steadfast instead of stedfast] and her formatting: She drops out the KJV italics and verse numbering to make the passage more

readable; she uses poetic lines, but indents, beginning with verse four; she omits part of verse 18, marking the omission with elision marks [“yea, thou shalt dig about thee, and thou shalt take they rest in safety. . . .], and also drops out the “Also” at the beginning of verse 19.

Thou shalt be steadfast [sic], and shalt not fear:  
Because thou shalt forget thy misery,  
and remember it as waters that pass away:  
    And thine age shall be clearer than the noonday;  
    Thou shalt shine forth, thou shalt be as the morning.  
    And thou shalt be secure,  
    Because there is hope . . . .  
    Thou shalt lie down,  
    And none shall make thee afraid;  
    Yea, many shall make suit unto thee.  
    But the eyes of the wicked shall fail,  
    And they shall not escape,  
    And their hope shall be as the giving up of the ghost. – Job 11:15-20

What she does not tell us is that these words did not encourage Job at all, but actually infuriated him!

**In Summary:** Two crucial points stand in a certain tension with each other: 1) The importance of applying the words of Scripture in helpful ways, not in ways that wound. Here the official Study Guide has it right. 2) The recognition that Bible writers (and Ellen White) often ignore the literary context, choosing to use the words of Scripture because of their known devotional value for the devout. Perhaps the words of P. T. Forsyth apply here, especially for those of us with an academic bent who may be inclined to place a lesser value on the actual words of Scripture while stressing the importance of literary context:

I do not believe in verbal inspiration. I am with the critics in principle. But the true minister ought to find the words and phrases of the Bible so full of spiritual food and felicity that he has some difficulty in not believing in verbal inspiration. – P. T. Forsyth, *Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind* (1907), 38; Eerdmans reprint, 26.

**Theme: Retributive Punishment**

**Leading Question:** Is it possible that the book of Job eliminates all possibilities of speaking of retributive punishment?

This week's lesson focuses on Job's second and third "friends," Bildad and Zophar, who are even more brutal than Eliphaz was. In Job 11:6, Zophar confidently asserts: "Know then that God exacts of you less than your guilt deserves" (NRSV). How could Job's "friend" come to such a conclusion?

If we look at what we can know about "punishment" for sin, Job's friends assume that any trouble that falls upon a human is the result of that person's sin. In other words, they want a completely predictable universe in which all good deeds are rewarded positively and all bad deeds are rewarded negatively.

When disaster or trouble strikes, four explanations are possible. How could each of these fit Job's circumstances?

**1. Deserved punishment arising from within the deviant behavior itself.** To take a simple example, if one eats green apples one could expect a stomach ache. In Scripture the phrase: "your blood shall be upon your own head" broadens that application to any "deserved" punishment. It is like a boomerang. The sin carries its own reward and returns on the head of the sinner. Joshua 2:19 uses that line to apply to any of Rahab's family who are not in her house when Jericho falls. If they are not where they are supposed to be, "their blood will be upon their own head." In 1 Kings 2:32, Joab is handled in the same way. His blood would be upon his own head because of his guilt in killing innocent men. In Acts 18:6, Paul uses the same line when the Jews rejected the preaching of Christ: "Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent of it. From now on I will go to the Gentiles" (NIV).

**2. External punishment applied for deliberate disobedience.** In this case, the reward is not a stomach for eating green apples, but a whipping for disregarding parental counsel. In a sense, it could be seen as deserved, but the punishment is separate from the offense. In Job, the friends assume that all good behavior is rewarded "externally" by God and all bad behavior is rewarded "externally" by God. Thus when Job fell into difficulty, they assumed that he was being punished for bad behavior.

**3. Accident related.** In ancient cultures and still today in some tribal societies, every negative deed, whether deliberate or not, must be "punished." Numbers 35 spells out how the cities of refuge were intended to moderate this custom in case of accidents. But the offender still had to find his way to the city before the avenger of blood (*goel*) tracked him down. In more civilized lands we would put some distance between natural disasters and human behavior. Job's friends, however, saw natural disasters in terms of the second category: punishment from God for sins committed.

**4. Demonic initiative.** Job’s whole situation is thrown into question because of the role of Satan. Job himself doesn’t know about Satan, but the author and the readers do because of the prologue to the book. In this connection, Ellen White suggests a tantalizing application to virtually everything in life: “There is not a blessing which God bestows upon man, nor a trial which He permits to befall him, but Satan both can and will seize upon it to tempt, to harass and destroy the soul, if we give him the least advantage.” – *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 421

The suggestion in the official study guide that much of what the friends said was true – but was just misapplied to Job, needs to be revisited.

**Question:** Could one almost say that no inspired passage should be seen as “true” apart from the application?

Even where the application may seem to be correct, the attitude of the one making the application can be negative. Speaking to A. T. Jones, Ellen White wrote, “Every sermon you preach, every article you write, may be all true; but one drop of gall in it will be poison to the hearer or the reader. Because of that drop of poison, one will discard all your good and acceptable words. Another will feed on the poison; for he loves such harsh words; he follows your example, and talks just as you talk. Thus the evil is multiplied.” *Testimonies* 6:123.

**Question:** Can we cite certain biblical events and indeed the final judgment as examples of God’s “retributive” judgment?

The official study guide refers to the flood (Genesis 6-8), the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 18), the Korah, Dathan, and Abiram tragedy (Numbers 16:1-23), and the final judgment as examples of God’s “retributive” judgment (cf. *The Great Controversy*, 672, 673).

But all that needs to be seen in the light of Ellen White’s interpretation of Jesus’ treatment of sinners, especially with reference to this comment: “He fearlessly denounced hypocrisy, unbelief, and iniquity, but tears were in His voice as He uttered His scathing rebukes” *The Desire of Ages*, 354. And in *Christ’s Object Lesson*, Ellen White makes this striking statement: “God destroys no man. Everyone who is destroyed will have destroyed himself.” COL, 84.

Yes, the Bible sometimes draws a direct connection between sin and God’s punishment. But in the case of the flood and Sodom and Gomorrah, one can argue that God’s purpose was to protect the innocent from rampant violence. Such an interpretation allows us to see tears in God’s eyes, rather than just anger when he destroys the wicked. Isaiah 28:21 refers to God’s judgment against the wicked as “his strange act” (KJV). This enables us to see God’s great love for all his children, even the wicked.

**Question:** Is there always a clear correlation between wickedness and punishment in the incidents related in Scripture?

The tidy rationale of Job’s friends quickly breaks down when we look at how God actually deals with sinners in Scripture. To us, the death of Uzzah when he touched the ark while just trying to be helpful (2 Sam. 6:6) and the mauling of the 42 boys who mocked Elisha (2 Kings 2:23-24) seem extreme, especially when compared with immoral behavior of Eli’s two sons,

Hophni and Phineas. As the NIV of 1 Samuel 2:12 puts it, “Eli’s sons were scoundrels; they had no regard for the LORD.” Indeed, they broke all the rules of priestly behavior when they took the priestly portion of the sacrifices offered at the sanctuary (1 Sam. 2:13-17) and when they “slept with the women who served at the entrance of the tent of meeting” (1 Sam. 2:22). They eventually received their reward, but they carried the ark all over the country without being touched. No, based on what we can know, the “judgments” of God are highly unpredictable. And the book of Job is a reminder of all that.

**Note:** What follows is an article written by J. Paul Grove, former Professor of Theology at Walla Walla College. Grove passed to his rest at age 95 on February 20, 2015, after a long and fruitful ministry. In this article, Grove places a positive construction on the idea of a God of love in his interpretation of God’s “retributive” judgments.

## Do You Like God?

### *How long will sinners suffer in hell?*

By J. Paul Grove

*Walla Walla College Alumni Review*, Winter, 1976, pp. 8-9

Even though you may have been a church member for some time and the question seems out of place, how would you answer it if you faced it squarely and honestly? Do you like everything you know about God? In the back of your mind, are there questions that have not been satisfactorily answered?

We know that God is love. 1 John 4:8 is a familiar concept: “He that loveth not, knoweth not God, for God is love.” That is what we *should* believe, and what we *want* to believe. Yet, certain disturbing statements are difficult to harmonize with this God of love.

One of them in His use of tormenting fire in the final destruction of the wicked. Notice the description in Revelation 20:7-10, 14-15 RSV: “And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be loosed from his prison...And they march up over the broad earth and surround the camp of the saints and the beloved city. But fire came down from Heaven and consumed them. And the Devil who had deceived them was thrown into a lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet were, and there they will be tormented day and night, forever and ever...Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire.” This is the second death, the lake of fire, and if anyone’s name was not found in the Book of Life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

This picture is even more disturbing, as described in *The Great Controversy* p. 673: “The wicked receive their recompense in the earth...They ‘shall be stubble and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of Hosts’...Some are destroyed as in a moment, while others suffer many days. All are punished ‘according to their deeds’...(Satan’s) 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.”

Does God work a miracle to keep a person alive and suffering for days in a lake of fire? Probation is closed prior to this. Of what value is prolonged suffering now? No character can be changed. No soul can be saved. How do you harmonize this with a God of love?



Some inspired statements help. “God destroys no man. Everyone who is destroyed will have destroyed himself” (*Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 84, 85). A biblical reference is “the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life” (Romans 6:23). Notice the clear separation between the work of God and that of sin. Sin is the destroyer. God is the giver of life. Revelation 20 itself also helps. It calls this fiery destruction the second death.

In all Scripture there is only one description of a person in the throes of the second death. That person was Christ. What killed Him? Fire from God out of heaven? A lake of fire? If he died any other death than the death that the sinner is to die, He did not die our death. And yet there is no fire mentioned in His death.

Without going into great detail, the description of Christ’s suffering is a picture of *mental* agony. What Christ gave expression to while He was dying on the cross was mental anguish. “My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46-50). “It was not bodily suffering which so quickly ended the life of Christ upon the cross, it was the crushing weight of the sins of the world and the sense of the Father’s wrath that broke His heart” (Ellen G. White, “The Suffering of Christ,” *The Bible Student’s Library*, No. 4, April 1889).

“Christ’s keenest anguish was the sense of His father’s displeasure. Because of this, His mental agony was of such intensity that man can have but a faint conception of it...Many have suffered death by slow tortures; others have suffered death by crucifixion. In what does the death of God’s dear Son differ from these?...If the sufferings of Christ consisted in physical pain alone, then His death was no more painful than that of some of the martyrs...The sins of the world,...the sense of His Father’s wrath,...crushed His soul,...brought despair” (*Testimonies*, Vol. 2, pp. 213, 214).”And now the Lord of glory was dying , a ransom for the race...but His suffering was from the sense of the malignity of sin...So great was this agony that His physical pain was hardly felt” (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 752, 753).

These statements indicate that that which killed Christ occurred in the mind. It was mental anguish; agony that originated in thought processes. The destroying agony was not caused by the physical body’s being destroyed on the cross, or because the physical body’s being destroyed on the cross, or because the physical body was being burned by fire. If this is the only description, and it is, of the second death of a human being, then it ought to say something to us. The death of man is not brought about by what we usually think of as a lake of fire.

To go a little bit further, there are statements that indicate that Christ’s death was like the death of man as a sinner. Which then says, “All right, we’ve taken a look at what killed Him.” That which ended His life should be the cause of the final death of the sinner.

“Christ felt the anguish which the sinner will feel when mercy shall no longer plead for the guilty race” (*Ibid.*, p. 753). That would be after the close of probation, wouldn’t it? “This agony He must not exert His divine power to escape. As man He must suffer the consequence of man’s sin. As man He must endure the wrath of God against transgression” (*Ibid.*, p. 686).

He did endure the wrath of God, He did feel God’s displeasure at sin. He felt it not because of the spikes that were driven through His hands. He felt it because of the mental torture and the mental anguish He was experiencing. [8/9]

Soul sorrow can bring death. Christ Himself said on the way to Gethsemane, “My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death” (Matthew 26:38). When He came forth from Gethsemane, the marks of the battle that went on in His mind were still there. Soul sorrow almost

destroyed Christ in Gethsemane even before the cross. “Having made the decision, He fell dying to the ground” (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 693).

What is it, then, that actually destroys man in the second death? I suggest to you that we could express it in one word: “glory.” God’s glory destroys man in the second death. “Like Israel of old the wicked destroy themselves; they fall by their iniquity. By a life of sin, they have placed themselves so out of harmony with God, their natures have become so debased with evil, that the manifestation of His glory is to them a consuming fire” (*The Great Controversy*, p. 37). What is the word? Fire!

“This is not an act of arbitrary power on the part of God” (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 764). Man himself determines how he will react to that glory. “He who is to the transgressors of His law a devouring fire, is to His people a safe pavilion” (*The Great Controversy*, p. 654). “While God is to the wicked a consuming fire, He is to His people both a sun and a shield” (*Ibid.*, p. 673). “The light of the glory of God, which imparts life to the righteous, will slay the wicked” (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 108).

“How can the manifestation of His glory, His character, cause degrees of suffering and finally bring death?”

I suggest that soul agony or mental anguish is proportionate to the purity and the sensitivity of the conscience. That is why Christ died so quickly.

But Satan and all hardened sinners do not have a conscience; at least, a working conscience. That is, not until they try to take the holy city, after the thousand years and see that “great panoramic scene.” In that scene they are shown all the events of earth’s history that have to do with the salvation of man and their need for it. They see Christ for what He is, how loving He is, how great He is. They see how awful they are by way of comparison. For a thrilling devotion sometime, read *The Great Controversy*, pages 662-673.

Christ appears above the city seated on a throne of burnished gold. “Around Him are the subjects of His kingdom. The power and majesty of Christ no language can describe... The glory of the Eternal Father is enshrouding His Son. The brightness of His presence fills the City of God, and flows out beyond the gates, flooding the whole earth with its radiance.”

“As soon as the books of record are opened, and the eye of Jesus looks upon the wicked, they are conscious of every sin which they have ever committed.”

Now the suffering begins. The conscience is becoming sensitized. It may have been hardened, it may have been seared, but seeing every act in its true light begins to stir it. And the pain of conscience is the most difficult to endure. Notice the description in the same paragraph that talks about becoming conscious of every sin. “...all appear (that is, all the sins) as if written in letters of fire.” The sins burn into their consciousness as with letters of fire. That is mental agony!

“The awful spectacle appears just as it was. Satan, his angels, and his subjects have no power to turn from the picture of their own work. Each actor recalls the part which he performed... They vainly seek to hide from the divine majesty of His countenance, outshining the glory of the sun, while the redeemed cast their crowns at the Saviour’s feet, exclaiming, ‘He died for me!’”

The awfulness of their sin slowly sinks in. Guilt and despair rise to a level that cannot be endured. Then the wicked die the same death that Christ died. It is a death caused by mental agony.

The purer the conscience in this life, the more quickly the blessed relief of death will occur then. It will not take so long to fully sensitize it to the awfulness of sin. The redeemed do not have to endure that suffering! They “throw their crowns at the Saviour’s feet exclaiming, ‘He died for me!’”

What a picture of a loving God! Is there a literal fire in Revelation 20? Yes, that literal fire consumes the bodies of sinners already dead; killed by mental anguish and suffering. It rids the earth of every trace of sin. It melts the elements of the earth with fervent heat. The earth is purified. “God destroys no man. Everyone who is destroyed will have destroyed himself.”

**Theme: Innocent Blood**

**Leading Question:** How is it possible for a man who shares the common guilt of all humankind to also claim to be innocent as Job did?

The book of Job shows us that a man who is sinner like all of us can still claim to be innocent. Given his status as sinner, should he be faulted for claiming to suffer without cause? Sometimes innocent people claim to be sinful just because they are convinced that it is wrong to claim innocence. But are there any biblical examples of sinners to rightfully claimed innocence?

**Note:** The long shadow of Jesus' story of the Pharisee and the tax collector (Luke 18:9-14) can prevent us from being honest with our own situation. It is indeed possible for good people to be accused of evil when they don't deserve it. The following examples may be helpful:

**1. Jesus himself.** The problem with taking courage from Jesus' example is that Jesus truly was without sin of any kind. It would seem arrogant for a sinful human being to piggyback on his good life. But there is an impulse for evil people to avoid the good precisely because they are themselves evil. Jesus put it this way in John 3:

John 3: 19 This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. 20 Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. 21 But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God. (NIV)

**2. Daniel.** Even though the Babylonian wise men owed their lives to Daniel's intervention under Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 2), under Darius his colleagues apparently found his "goodness" to be insufferable and tried to find a cause to accuse him. They finally concluded: "We will never find any basis for charges against this man Daniel unless it has something to do with the law of his God." (Dan. 6:5, NIV). In this case, Daniel escaped unscathed and his opponents were crushed when the king threw them to the lions in place of Daniel.

**3. The Psalmists.** Nearly half of all the psalms are complaints and several of these are lament psalms in which the psalmist complains because he is being attacked even though he is innocent. Ps. 17 and Ps. 26 are two examples of this type of psalm. So Job is not the only good man who has suffered and has not been afraid to tell God so.

**4. Jeremiah.** One of the more striking examples of someone who has suffered innocently is the prophet Jeremiah. And in his case, he was not able to keep from giving his accusers a verbal tongue-lashing. Jeremiah 19:19-23 is a good example, translated with remarkable vividness in the Contemporary English Version:

19 Please, Lord, answer my prayer.

Make my enemies stop  
accusing me of evil.

20 I tried to help them,  
but they are paying me back  
by digging a pit to trap me.

I even begged you  
not to punish them.

21 But now I am asking you  
to let their children starve  
or be killed in war.

Let women lose  
their husbands and sons  
to disease and violence.

22 These people have dug pits  
and set traps for me, Lord.

Make them scream in fear  
when you send enemy troops  
to attack their homes.

23 You know they plan to kill me.  
So get angry and punish them!

Don't ever forgive  
their terrible crimes.

**Question:** What is the role of the demonic in attacking innocent people?

**Note:** Job and Jesus are the two most obvious examples of innocent people who were attacked as a result of demonic machinations. Job, course didn't know about Satan in the same way as New Testament people do. But he is clearly an example of someone who suffered as a result of a demonic plot.

**Question:** What is the role of Providence in those situations where innocent people suffer?

The NIV margin of Romans 8:28 reads as follows: "In all things God works together with those who love him to bring about what is good." That allows more flexibility than the typical reading of "all things work together for good." It is easier for a free-will person to see God working within circumstances than to claim that all things are good.

**Question:** In Job's case, what was the "good" that came out of his disaster?

In terms of earthly goods, Job received twice what he had before and also another family of seven sons and three daughters. Some have suggested that this “reward” actually undermines the moral of the book that Job is an example of “disinterested morality.”

Could one point to the cosmic impact of the book? Job does demonstrate to the universe that it is possible to be harassed by demonic forces yet maintain one’s integrity. The unwritten law underlying Job’s experience seems to be that when one commits one’s way to God, permission is granted to be thrown to the lions, so to speak, in order to demonstrate the goodness of God.

Finally, in the spirit of Romans 8:28, lines from George MacDonald are appropriate:

It is so true, as the Book says, that all things work together for our good, even our sins and vices. He takes our sins on himself, and while he drives them out of us with a whip of scorpions, he will yet make them work his good ends. He defeats our sins, makes them prisoners, forces them into the service of good, and chains them like galley slaves to the rowing benches of the gospel ship. He makes them work toward salvation for us. – George MacDonald, “The Bloodhound,” *The Curate’s Awakening* (Bethany, 1985), 200

**Theme: Intimations of Hope**

**Leading Question:** To what extent does Job establish a firm link between the believer’s hope and the resurrection and future life?

In the lesson for December 17, the study guide takes us to the famous “resurrection” passage in Job (Job 19:25): “I know that my Redeemer lives....” Once one knows the truth of the resurrection hope, it has ever been the tendency for believers to read that hope back into those passages where there is actually only a gentle intimation of the resurrection hope. But we will discuss that matter more fully in two weeks time.

Here we need to point out that it was possible for Old Testament people to live in hope, even though the resurrection was still only a shadowy future hope. Still, a future hope lurks everywhere in Old Testament thinking.

In contrast to the “nature” religion of the Canaanite where everything was cyclical and natural and there was no future goal, the Israelite view of history was linear and goal-oriented. Not only did the Israelites look forward to a deliverer, the Messiah, they also looked forward to a world where no one would hurt or destroy. In that connection, the New Earth scene from Isaiah 11:6-9 presents a wonderful ideal hope:

Isaiah 11:6 The wolf shall live with the lamb,  
the leopard shall lie down with the kid,  
the calf and the lion and the fatling together,  
and a little child shall lead them.  
7 The cow and the bear shall graze,  
their young shall lie down together;  
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.  
8 The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp,  
and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder’s den.  
9 They will not hurt or destroy  
on all my holy mountain;  
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord  
as the waters cover the sea.

But in the book of Job, the ending is still the classic Old Testament view: “And Job died, old and full of days” (Job 42:17, NRSV). The Greek translation, produced at a time when the resurrection hope was more palpable – Daniel 12:2 contributed to the hope – adds the resurrection hope to the end of Job: “And he will live again with those whom the Lord raises up.”

It has been noted by many scholars that the book of Job seems to reflect something like the Abrahamic era. There, too, the patriarch lives on through his children. A future hope for the

individual is not yet clear. In the words of Genesis 25:8, “Abraham breathed his last and died at a good old age, an old man and full of years; and he was gathered to his people.” Once one gets to the New Testament era, that has all changed and Paul celebrates the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15 as if that was the only thing that made this life worth living: “If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied” (1 Cor. 15:19, NIV).

Job was not there yet. But he had such a deep abiding faith in God that he knew God would provide all that he needed.

**Question:** If Job 13:15 can be translated as being more affirming of unshakable faith: “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him” (KJV) or as being more confrontational: “He will kill me, I have no hope” (NRSV), which is more likely to be heard from the mouth of Job?

**Note:** Of the 51 English translations available at Biblegateway.com, 33 are more directly affirming of hope, 18 are more confrontational, even defiant. In both cases Job confirms his intention to continue believing, but the “minority” view is definitely more confrontational. The evangelical translations tend to be more affirming; the so-called “mainstream” ones are more confrontational. My personal preference is for the more confrontational version. The impulse among evangelical readers is to soft-pedal skepticism and defiance over against God. Indeed, that seems to have been such an unavoidable stance for the rabbis that some of them declared that Job did in fact curse God after all. That’s why he had a double reward in this life because he would have no reward in the world to come!

In general, evangelical versions often skirt the issues in the Old Testament skeptical tradition (Job, Ecclesiastes). One of the more striking examples of avoidance comes from the evangelical cult expert, Walter Martin, who volunteered his opinion on the book of Ecclesiastes as part of his refutation of the Adventist use of Ecclesiastes 9:5 to support the Adventist understanding of soul sleep:

“It is almost universally agreed among Biblical scholars that Ecclesiastes portrays Solomon’s apostasy and is therefore virtually worthless for determining doctrine. It sketches man’s ‘life under the sun’ and reveals the hopelessness of the soul apart from God. The conclusion of the Book alone mirrors the true revelation of God (chap. 12).” – Walter Martin, *The Truth About Seventh-day Adventists*, 1960, p. 127, note #11

**Question:** Does Job’s defiant defense of his innocence before God give modern believers permission to do the same?

The following words from Job 13 certainly make Job’s point clear: “I will surely defend my ways to his face. Indeed, this will turn out for my deliverance, for no godless person would dare come before him!” (Job 13:15-16, NIV).

Whether or not one is willing to confront God like that probably depends on temperament and upbringing. In 1980-81 when we are at Marienhoehe Seminary in Darmstadt, Germany for a



teacher exchange, the Sabbath School lessons were also on Job. A number of students returned from visiting in local German churches declaring that many of the saints were quite unhappy that we were spending an entire quarter on Job. Why? “Because no one should talk to God the way Satan talked to God!”

I would simply say that the Bible gives us permission to ask our questions, even if they appear to be somewhat defiant. But there is nothing that says that everyone must talk that way. We can each relate to him in ways that preserves his honor and glory.

**Note:** Job’s defiance deepens even further in 13:17-28:

- 13:17 Listen carefully to what I say;  
let my words ring in your ears.
- 18 Now that I have prepared my case,  
I know I will be vindicated.
- 19 Can anyone bring charges against me?  
If so, I will be silent and die.
- 20 “Only grant me these two things, God,  
and then I will not hide from you:
- 21 Withdraw your hand far from me,  
and stop frightening me with your terrors.
- 22 Then summon me and I will answer,  
or let me speak, and you reply to me.
- 23 How many wrongs and sins have I committed?  
Show me my offense and my sin.
- 24 Why do you hide your face  
and consider me your enemy?
- 25 Will you torment a windblown leaf?  
Will you chase after dry chaff?
- 26 For you write down bitter things against me  
and make me reap the sins of my youth.
- 27 You fasten my feet in shackles;  
you keep close watch on all my paths  
by putting marks on the soles of my feet.
- 28 “So man wastes away like something rotten,  
like a garment eaten by moths.

Most likely this defiant tone is what set off his friends. In the end, however, God tells the friends that Job has spoken the truth about God. If they will request prayer from Job on their behalf, God will grant them forgiveness: “I will accept his prayer and not deal with you according to your folly. You have not spoken the truth about me, as my servant Job has” (Job 42:8, NIV).

**Theme: The Wrath of Elihu**

**Leading Question:** In the end, God tells Job’s three friends that they need to repent. But he doesn’t say a thing about Elihu. Does that mean that Elihu had it right where the other friends got it wrong?

Some scholars have suggested that Elihu’s voice is somewhat softer in tone than that of the friends, a kind of buffer between the anger of the friends and God’s strong words to Job out of the storm. There is reason to question that position. If I were Job, here are the elements from Elihu’s address that would anger me:

**32:2:** “But Elihu.... became very angry with Job for justifying himself rather than God.”

But was Job really presenting an either/or position? Was he not maintaining his own innocence while seeking a response from God? It sounds to me like Elihu has seriously misrepresented Job’s position.

**33:9-10:** Elihu quotes Job as saying: “I am pure, I have done no wrong; I am clean and free from sin. Yet God has found fault with me; he considers me his enemy.”

Maybe Job gives that impression. But perhaps it would be more accurate to say that Job complains about God’s silence, not that God has found fault with him.

**33:12:** “In this you are not right, for God is greater than any mortal.”

I think Job would agree with Elihu that God is greater than any mortal. But he would be outraged to hear Elihu go on to say that God responds to some but not others.

**34:5-9:** Here is Elihu’s indictment of Job:

- 5 “Job says, ‘I am innocent,  
but God denies me justice.
- 6 Although I am right,  
I am considered a liar;  
although I am guiltless,  
his arrow inflicts an incurable wound.’
- 7 Is there anyone like Job,  
who drinks scorn like water?
- 8 He keeps company with evildoers;  
he associates with the wicked.
- 9 For he says, ‘There is no profit  
in trying to please God.’

The clear implication is that Job is a wicked man and furthermore that he sees no value in trying to please God. But isn't Job tenacious in his commitment to God? He is not seeking some selfish benefit. He simply wants to understand.

**34:11-12:** Elihu's simple reward scheme is as bad as anything his three friends have offered:

11 He (God) repays everyone for what they have done;  
he brings on them what their conduct deserves.

12 It is unthinkable that God would do wrong,  
that the Almighty would pervert justice.

Does Job really claim that God perverts justice? Is he not more likely to claim that if God would only answer, then Job could understand?

**34:17, 24, 29, 33, 37:** These verses noted build up to a devastating indictment of everything Job stands for:

17 Can someone who hates justice govern?  
Will you condemn the just and mighty One?

24 Without inquiry he shatters the mighty  
and sets up others in their place.

33 But if he remains silent, who can condemn him?  
If he hides his face, who can see him?  
Yet he is over individual and nation alike,

37 To his sin he adds rebellion;  
scornfully he claps his hands among us  
and multiplies his words against God.

Job's complaint is indeed that God has remained silent. But his insistence that God speak up is hardly rebellion. At least God did not see it that way in his final commendation of Job.

**35:3, 6-8, 12, 16:** After arguing that God can stay silent if he wishes, Elihu goes on to claim that God only stays silent because of the "arrogance of the wicked," implying that Job is indeed one of the arrogant wicked ones:

3 Yet you ask him, 'What profit is it to me,  
and what do I gain by not sinning?'

6 If you sin, how does that affect him?  
If your sins are many, what does that do to him?

7 If you are righteous, what do you give to him,

or what does he receive from your hand?  
8 Your wickedness only affects humans like yourself,  
and your righteousness only other people.

12 He does not answer when people cry out  
because of the arrogance of the wicked.

16 So Job opens his mouth with empty talk;  
without knowledge he multiplies words.”

Elihu may argue that what human beings do has no affect on God. But the presence of the book of Job in the canon powerfully suggests that what people do affects the whole universe!

**36:8-9, 18-21, 28; 37:5, 19, 23-24:** Elihu concludes his diatribe by implying that Job is not only arrogantly wicked, but that he is being powerfully tempted by evil, and that in the end it is hopeless to expect a response from the distant God of the universe:

36:8 But if people are bound in chains,  
held fast by cords of affliction,  
9 he tells them what they have done—  
that they have sinned arrogantly.

18 Be careful that no one entices you by riches;  
do not let a large bribe turn you aside.  
19 Would your wealth or even all your mighty efforts  
sustain you so you would not be in distress?  
20 Do not long for the night,  
to drag people away from their homes.  
21 Beware of turning to evil,  
which you seem to prefer to affliction.

37:5 God’s voice thunders in marvelous ways;  
he does great things beyond our understanding.

19 “Tell us what we should say to him;  
we cannot draw up our case because of our darkness.

23 The Almighty is beyond our reach and exalted in power;  
in his justice and great righteousness, he does not oppress.  
24 Therefore, people revere him,  
for does he not have regard for all the wise in heart?

The juxtaposition of Elihu's words with the voice of God from the storm represent a stunning rebuke of the young man Elihu who presumed to instruct his elders. Far from being "beyond our reach," he speaks to those who question him. His regard for justice and righteousness means that with reference to the wise in heart, he will talk back. And that is precisely what he does, beginning in chapter 38.

**Question:** What important addition to the debate is offered by Job's statement of his ethical principles in Job 31?

G. W. Anderson, the godly Old Testament Professor at the University of Edinburgh when I was completing my doctoral program there, described Job 31 as the "finest statement of ethics in the Old Testament. It is worth noting the points that Job enumerates, all in his own defense as he presents his case before God – and the universe:

- 1 He vows not to "look lustfully at a young woman"
- 5 He has not "walked with falsehood" or "hurried after deceit"
- 9 He has not allowed himself to be "enticed by a woman" or to have "lurked at my neighbor's door"
- 13 He has not "denied justice to any of my servants"
- 16 He has met the needs of the "poor," the "widow," the "fatherless," those without clothes,
- 21 He has not used his influence in court to testify against the fatherless
- 24-25 He has not relied on wealth or gold
- 26-27 He has not allowed himself to be enticed by the worship of sun or moon
- 29-30 He has not rejoiced at his enemy's misfortune or pronounced a curse against him
- 31 He has never let the members of his household go hungry
- 32 He has not allowed the stranger or traveler to remain in the street
- 33-34 He has never concealed his sins for fear of the contempt of the people
- 38-40 He has been a faithful steward of his land and supported his tenants

Against the backdrop of this confession, Job rests his case. And embedded in the same chapter is his passionate cry to God for openness and justification:

- 35 ("Oh, that I had someone to hear me!  
I sign now my defense—let the Almighty answer me;  
let my accuser put his indictment in writing.
- 36 Surely I would wear it on my shoulder,  
I would put it on like a crown.
- 37 I would give him an account of my every step;  
I would present it to him as to a ruler.)—

**Theme: Out of the Whirlwind**

**Leading Question:** If you had lots of questions to ask God and after a long silence he talked back but did not answer your questions, would you – like Job – be satisfied?

When we have questions, our level of satisfaction with the response – if and when it comes – depends a great deal on the one offering the response. When God speaks out of the whirlwind, he ends up giving Job a long list of questions, none of which Job is able to answer. In effect, he scores zero out of eighty-eight! Yet Job seems greatly relieved that God has at least responded in some way.

Remarkably, the content of the divine response is very similar to two earlier sections in the book. First, the kinds of questions Job poses himself in his reflections on wisdom in Job 28 are very similar to the kinds of questions posed by God. Second, in Elihu's response, he prefaces his last words with this introduction: "Listen to this Job; stop and consider God's wonders" (37:13, NIV). Then he launches into descriptions of God's wonders that are strikingly similar to the content of the divine response: "Do you know how God controls the clouds and makes his lightning flash?" (37:15, NIV) and again, "Can you join him in spreading out the skies, hard as a mirror of cast bronze?" (37:18, NIV).

Neither Job nor God tell us how they reacted to Elihu speech. But it is remarkable that no sooner does Elihu tell Job not to expect a divine response than God speaks from the whirlwind – and Job exclaims that he will say no more: "I spoke once, but I have no answer – twice, but I will say no more." In the end, Job seems to have been satisfied just to hear God's voice, even though God does not answer his questions.

**Question:** Where else in Scripture does God remind us that humans cannot really understand the things of God?

Two crucial biblical passages remind us that God's ways are not our ways:

**Deuteronomy 29:29:** "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law" (NIV).

**Isaiah 55:8-9:** "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord.. 9 For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."

In the writings of Ellen White, a comment originally published in the *Review and Herald* in 1892 provides the equivalent thought:

“We have many lessons to learn, and many, many to unlearn. God and heaven alone are infallible. Those who think that they will never have to give up a cherished view, never have occasion to change an opinion, will be disappointed. As long as we hold to our own ideas and opinions with determined persistency, we cannot have the unity for which Christ prayed” – July 26, 1892. Reprinted in *Selected Messages*, Book 1, p. 37

**Question:** Does the fact that God asked Job so many unanswerable questions mean that we should not ask our questions?

From Scripture two arguments can be presented in response to the question:

1. God published Job’s questions for us all to read. If all we had was God’s answer without Job’s experience, ours would be a very impoverished world. Some will need to go through the same pilgrimage that Job went through and ask the same questions that he asked. In the end, they may find themselves satisfied with God’s response, just as Job was. But one cannot arrive at that point without first asking the questions.

2. Scripture forcefully admonishes us to search for wisdom. The book of Proverbs offers some of the clearest arguments for seeking wisdom. Proverbs 2:1-6 is a good examples

Proverbs 2:1 My child, if you accept my words  
and treasure up my commandments within you,  
2 making your ear attentive to wisdom  
and inclining your heart to understanding;  
3 if you indeed cry out for insight,  
and raise your voice for understanding;  
4 if you seek it like silver,  
and search for it as for hidden treasures—  
5 then you will understand the fear of the Lord  
and find the knowledge of God.  
6 For the Lord gives wisdom;  
from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.

From the writings of Ellen White, the importance of the exploratory mind receives further support:

**1. The example of John Wycliffe:** “Wycliffe received a liberal education, and with him the fear of the Lord was the beginning of wisdom. He was noted at college for his fervent piety as well as for his remarkable talents and sound scholarship. In his thirst for knowledge he sought to become acquainted with every branch of learning. He was educated in the scholastic philosophy, in the canons of the church, and in the civil law, especially that of his own country. In his after-labors the value of this early training was apparent. A thorough acquaintance with the speculative philosophy of his time enabled him to expose its errors; and by his study of national and ecclesiastical law he was prepared to engage in the great struggle for civil and religious liberty. While he could wield the weapons drawn from the word of God, he had acquired the intellectual discipline of the schools, and he understood the tactics of the schoolmen. The power of his

genius and the extent and thoroughness of his knowledge commanded the respect of both friends and foes. His adherents saw with satisfaction that their champion stood foremost among the leading minds of the nation; and his enemies were prevented from casting contempt upon the cause of reform by exposing the ignorance or weakness of its supporter.” – *The Great Controversy*, 80

**2. The importance of an inquiring mind in health reform:** “My voice shall be raised against novices undertaking to treat disease professedly according to the principles of health reform. God forbid that we should be the subjects for them to experiment upon! We are too few. It is altogether too inglorious a warfare for us to die in. God deliver us from such danger! We do not need such teachers and physicians. Let those try to treat disease who know something about the human system. The heavenly Physician was full of compassion. This spirit is needed by those who deal with the sick. Some who undertake to become physicians are bigoted, selfish, and mulish. You cannot teach them anything. It may be they have never done anything worth doing. They may not have made life a success. They know nothing really worth knowing, and yet they have started up to practice the health reform. We cannot afford to let such persons kill off this one and that one. No; we cannot afford it!” 2T 375 (1870)

**Note:** One of the great challenges in the modern world is to correlate historical and scientific discoveries with what is revealed in Scripture. Early in her experience (1872) Ellen noted the importance of disciplined learning:

“Ignorance will not increase the humility or spirituality of any professed follower of Christ. The truths of the divine word can be best appreciated by an intellectual Christian. Christ can be best glorified by those who serve Him intelligently. The great object of education is to enable us to use the powers which God has given us in such a manner as will best represent the religion of the Bible and promote the glory of God.” – *Testimonies for the Church* 3:160

Given the stridency of the rhetoric over creation, Ellen White’s comment about the creation account is also worth noting: “Just how God accomplished the work of creation He has never revealed to men; human science cannot search out the secrets of the Most High. His creative power is as incomprehensible as His existence.” – *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 113

The tendency of modern evangelicals is to assign absolute value to the statements in Scripture rather than seeing them as adaptations to limited human understanding. This position is illustrated in a 1963 book by S. I. McMillen, M. D., *None of These Diseases*, now re-issued in 2000 with co-author David Stern, M. D. This quote appears in the chapter, “Eel Eyes and Goose Guts”:

“God then gave Moses many health rules, filling a whole section of the Bible. Would Moses have enough faith to record the divine innovations, even if they contradicted his royal post-graduate university training? If Moses had yielded to his natural tendency to add even a little of his ‘higher education,’ the Bible would contain such prescriptions as ‘urine of a faithful wife’ or ‘blood of a worm.’ We might even expect him to prescribe the



‘latest’ animal manure concoction. But the record is clear: Moses recorded hundreds of health regulations but not a single current medical misconception.” – McMillen/Stern (2000: 11).

While it would be true that the Mosaic legislation represented a huge step forward in terms of human health and hygiene, such broad statements do not take into account those aspects of Scripture that do not correlate with modern science. Jacob’s genetic tricks with Laban (Genesis 30:25-43) would not be considered “science” even by the most devout evangelical, and the test for the unfaithful wife (Numbers 5:11-31), involving dust from the sanctuary floor mixed with holy water as a drink for a woman suspected of adultery would also not be seen as “scientific.” But it is very difficult for the devout to admit that anything in Scripture is not an reflection of absolute truth. To borrow some lines from Ellen White, it is not the words of the Bible that are inspired but the men who wrote the words (SM 1:21, 1958 [Ms 24, 1886])

Having said all that, however, we must remember how devastating the study of modern study of science can be for devout believers. Coming from outside the Adventist community, these two quotes illustrate that phenomenon. The first comment about the impact of science on orientals was written by Will Durant in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The second comment is from a well-known Iranian Scholar, Seyyid Hossein Nasr. He was so concerned about the effect of science on Islam that in 1983 he advised the Saudi government not to build a science museum because it could be a time bomb and destroy faith in Islam.

“Those Western educated Orientals had not only taken on political ideals in the course of their education abroad, they had shed religious ideas; the two processes are usually associated, in biography and in history. They came to Europe as pious youths, wedded to Krishna, Shiva, Vishnu, Kali, Rama...; they touched science, and their ancient faiths were shattered as by some sudden catalytic shock. Shorn of religious belief; which is the very spirit of India, the Westernized Hindus returned to their country disillusioned and sad; a thousand gods had dropped dead from the skies. Then, inevitably, Utopia filled the place of Heaven, democracy became a substitute for *Nirvana*, liberty replaced God. What had gone on in Europe in the second half of the eighteenth century now [1920s] went on in the East.” – Will Durant, *The Story of Our Civilization: Our Oriental Heritage*, 625-26 (Simon and Schuster, 1933, 1963).

Many people feel that in fact there is no such thing as the Islamic problem of science. They say science is science, whatever it happens to be, and Islam has always encouraged knowledge, *al-ilm* in Arabic, and therefore we should encourage science and what’s the problem? There is no problem. But the problem is there because ever since children began to learn Lavoisier’s Law that water is composed of oxygen and hydrogen, in many Islamic countries they came home that evening and stopped saying their prayers. – Seyyid Hossein Nasr [1988], Univ. Prof. of Islamic Studies, George Washington Univ. [web, 05]

**Question:** How does Job’s reaction to the divine theophany compare with that of Isaiah and Peter?

**Isaiah 6:1-5:** “In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. 2 Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. 3 And one called to another and said: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.” 4 The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke. 5 And I said: “Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!”

**Luke 5:1-8:** “Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, 2 he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. 3 He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. 4 When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.” 5 Simon answered, “Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.” 6 When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. 7 So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink. 8 But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, “Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!”

In short, an overwhelming sense of God’s presence, even if it is not a “rational” experience can contribute a powerful impulse towards honor and worship of the divine.

**Theme: Job's Redeemer**

**Leading Question:** What light does the Old Testament context throw on the word “Redeemer” and what it might have meant to Job?

This week's lesson focuses on the famous “Redeemer” passage in Job 19:25-27, given here first in classic KJV and then in the NRSV translation:

**Job 19:25-27 (KJV):** For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: 26 And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: 27 Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me.

**Job 19:25-27 (NRSV):** For I know that my Redeemer lives,  
and that at the last he will stand upon the earth;  
26 and after my skin has been thus destroyed,  
then in my flesh I shall see God,  
27 whom I shall see on my side,  
and my eyes shall behold, and not another.  
My heart faints within me!

For many reasons, this passage is both troubling and intriguing. Several years ago when I presented in brief form the material that I present here, a student burst out in class, “The size of our preachable Bible gets smaller and smaller!”

Underlying that exclamation is the conviction, widespread about devout believers, that if it is in the Bible, then God said it, and if God said it, it should be true for all time to all people and in all places. Ironically, that flies in the face of a long-standing academic goal of what is known as “exegesis,” the interpretation of a passage in time and place. But if a passage is interpreted in time and place, it can no longer have universal application.

So let's consider both the “universal” application and the “contextual” application and see if we can find ways of bringing the two together.

**1. Universal application:** Traditionally, this passage has been seen as suggesting that Job has caught a glimpse of two important Christian truths: 1) The redemptive work of the incarnate Lord Jesus, and 2) The resurrection of believers at the end of time.

**2. Contextual application:** The Hebrew word translated in most English Bibles as “Redeemer” is the word *goel*, the “near kinsman who comes to the aid of the family's name, honor, and property.” In the first instance, it would most likely be seen as Job's appeal to his *goel* as the one who could vindicate his name and honor.

Within the Old Testament, the *goel* is a very vivid term with violent overtones. The *goel*, for example, is the “avenger of blood” who is expected to even the score when someone has killed a family member. Numbers 35 presents this term in connection with the establishment of the cities of refuge, a half-way-house intended to protect someone who has taken life accidentally. It was the responsibility of the *goel* to restore the family’s honor by killing the one who had originally taken the life of a family member. In its raw and most primitive form, it made no difference whether the killing was intentional or accidental: the *goel* was expected to even the score by taking the life of the killer. The cities-of-refuge scheme allowed someone to find temporary refuge until a trial had determined whether the death was accidental or deliberate. But even if the killer was cleared of the charge of murder, he still had to remain in the city of refuge until the death of the high priest before he could go free. If he left the secure bounds of the city, the *goel* could take his life and be perfectly within his rights.

In addition to that “honor” aspect, the *goel* also had the responsibility for preserving the family name and property, functions which can be seen in the book of Ruth where Boaz, purchases Elimilech’s property and marries the widow Ruth in order to carry on the family name.

In connection with the Exodus story, Yahweh himself is actually depicted as Israel’s *goel*, the one who rescues his people from Egyptian slavery. Using the verb form for *goel*, Exodus 6:6 applies the imagery in this way: ‘I am Yahweh and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment’ (Exodus 6:6).

It should be noted that another Hebrew word (*padah*) is used when describing the substitution of one living creature for another to effect “redemption.” That is the word used in Exodus 13 where every firstborn is to be redeemed. *Padah* is more likely to include the idea of a price paid and thus contributes to the idea of substitutionary atonement. But the idea of a price paid is not at all prominent in the work of the *goel*.

If the *goel* is seen in its primary Old Testament sense, then application of the passage to a resurrection at the end of time also recedes in importance. *Goel* would thus be seen as the one having the “last word” that would enable Job to see God when his restoration comes.

**Correlation.** Once one knows the story of Jesus and understands the role of his resurrection in connection with the resurrection of believers at the end of time, the traditional interpretation of Job 19:25-27 becomes almost irresistible. And the application to Jesus and the end of time can still be a very helpful, albeit secondary application. But how much of that did Job know? Probably much less than the traditional explanation might suggest.

It is also well to remember that even when Jesus was on earth, the idea that he persistently presented that he was to die did not meet with any acceptance at all – until after the resurrection. One could surmise that the idea of the *goel*, the deliverer, loomed so large in the minds of the people that they could not conceive of a deliverer who would come to die. In connection with the coming of Jesus, a quotation from C. S. Lewis can remind us how difficult it was for Jesus to get his true message through to the people. His death and resurrection transformed the disciples’ perspective, but until then they could hardly even see through a glass darkly. Here are the Lewis’s haunting words:

“My idea of God is not a divine idea. It has to be shattered time after time. He shatters it Himself. He is the great iconoclast. Could we not almost say that this shattering is one of the marks of His presence? The Incarnation is the supreme example; it leaves all previous ideas of the Messiah in ruins.” – C. S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed*, IV.15

**Question:** How can the study of the Bible itself help devout believers come to understand that not all the truths that we hold dear were necessarily clear to earlier believers?

Examples from the Bible can be very helpful in approaching this goal. But a sobering aphorism has been attributed to Marshall McLuhan, “If I hadn’t believed it, I never would have seen it with my own eyes.” Until one has a framework in place which allows us to see new perspectives, we cannot see them. Here the Adventist idea of “present truth” can be very helpful. Ellen White used that phrase in the context of the 1888 discussions over law and grace when she suggested that a new perspective was very much in order. Here are her words:

The message "Go forward" is still to be heard and respected. The varying circumstances taking place in our world call for labor which will meet these peculiar developments. The Lord has need of men who are spiritually sharp and clear-sighted, men worked by the Holy Spirit, who are certainly receiving manna fresh from heaven. Upon the minds of such, God's Word flashes light, revealing to them more than ever before the safe path. The Holy Spirit works upon mind and heart. The time has come when through God's messengers the scroll is being unrolled to the world. Instructors in our schools should never be bound about by being told that they are to teach only what has been taught hitherto. Away with these restrictions. There is a God to give the message His people shall speak. Let not any minister feel under bonds or be gauged by men's measurement. The Gospel must be fulfilled in accordance with the messages God sends. **That which God gives His servants to speak today would not perhaps have been present truth twenty years ago, but it is God's message for this time.** – From MS 8a 1888, address to ministers on October 21, 1888, with apparent reference to a telegram from the "absent and ailing" president who urged the delegates to "stand by the landmarks" [Olson, *Thirteen Crisis Years* (1981) 282] = EGW1888, 133.

**Theme: The Character of Job**

**Leading Question:** Who gives the right assessment of Job’s character: Job himself, his friends, or God?

We can look at Job’s character from three perspectives: at the beginning before his troubles, during his troubles, or at the end when all the dust has settled. Let’s do a quick survey of all three:

**1. Prologue: God chooses Job as a showcase of an upright man.** God declares to Satan: “Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil.” (NRSV). The KJV uses the word “perfect” instead of “blameless.”

**Question:** Is there anything that happens during Job’s trials that would have changed God’s assessment of Job?

God presses Job hard in his interrogation – in which Job scored zero out of eighty-eight, but still tells the friends that Job has spoken the truth about God while they did not.

**2. Cycles of debate: Job searches his heart and soul.** Towards the end of the exchanges between Job and his friends, Job reflects on his loss of stature as a result of his troubles. In short, no one gives him the kind of respect which he once had, obviously a painful experience for Job. In 29:1-29, Job reflects on his standing in the community when things were going well. He had reason to be gratified at the universal respect shown him. Then in 30:1-31 he describes his pain when people treat him with disdain and even God is silent.

From the standpoint of behavioral norms, however, Job 31:1-40 is what G. W. Anderson, Professor of Old Testament at the University of Edinburgh during my doctoral studies there, described as the “finest statement of Old Testament ethics.” Here are the key elements, already noted in lesson 10:

- 1 He vows not to “look lustfully at a young woman”
- 5 He has not “walked with falsehood” or “hurried after deceit”
- 9 He has not allowed himself to be “enticed by a woman” or to have “lurked at my neighbor’s door”
- 13 He has not “denied justice to any of my servants”
- 16 He has met the needs of the “poor,” the “widow,” the “fatherless,” those without clothes,
- 21 He has not used his influence in court to testify against the fatherless

24-25 He has not relied on wealth or gold  
26-27 He has not allowed himself to be enticed by the worship of sun or moon  
29-30 He has not rejoiced at his enemy's misfortune or pronounced a curse against him  
31 He has never let the members of his household go hungry  
32 He has not allowed the stranger or traveler to remain in the street  
33-34 He has never concealed his sins for fear of the contempt of the people  
38-40 He has been a faithful steward of his land and supported his tenants

**Question:** Is there any indication in the book itself that would suggest that Job had not lived up to this ideal?

Given all the deviant behavior in the Old Testament, Job 31 is an astonishing statement of the ideal, apparently dating from the time of Abraham. And there is nothing in the book of Job itself that would suggest that Job did not live up to his ideal – except, of course, the less-than-subtle insinuations of the friends who assumed that because of his troubles, Job was involved in all kinds of illicit activities.

**3. God affirms Job in the end.** In spite of the hard questioning from out of the whirlwind, God still affirms to the friends that Job had spoken the truth about him (42:8).

**Question:** Does the hard questioning from out of the whirlwind point to any flaws in Job's character? Or would God still say about Job what he had said at the beginning, that here was a "blameless and upright" man?

**Theme: Some Lessons from Job**

**Leading Question:** For you, what is the most important take-away from our study of the book of Job?

As author of this study guide, I would focus on four points as worthy of special note in our study of the book of Job:

**1. Satan, the “accuser of the brethren.”** The book of Revelation highlights one of the most crucial moments in the Scripture, namely, the point at which Satan is cast out of heaven:

Revelation 12:10: “And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night.” (KJV)

Most believers tend to think of the war in heaven as something that took place at the beginning of this world’s history. And that represents an important partial truth. But Revelation 12:7-12 throws crucial light on that war. The final casting out of Satan did not happen at the beginning of time, but at the cross. Note the sequence of events in the passage:

10 Then I heard a loud voice in heaven, proclaiming,  
“Now have come the salvation and the power  
and the kingdom of our God  
and the authority of his Messiah,  
for the accuser of our comrades has been thrown down,  
who accuses them day and night before our God.  
11 But they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb  
and by the word of their testimony,  
for they did not cling to life even in the face of death.  
12 Rejoice then, you heavens  
and those who dwell in them!  
But woe to the earth and the sea,  
for the devil has come down to you  
with great wrath,  
because he knows that his time is short!” (NRSV)

The cross represents the great shift between Old Testament cosmology and the cosmology of the new. Prior to the cross, Satan is depicted as part of the “heavenly court” (see chapter 3 from *Who’s Afraid of the Old Testament God*, appended at the end of Lesson 1). The prologue of



Job includes this brief note: “Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came also among them” (Job 1:6, KJV). This appears to be the same kind of scene as found in 1 Kings 22:19-23 where Yahweh sits among the heavenly beings and holds court:

“I saw the Lord sitting on his throne, with all the host of heaven standing beside him to the right and to the left of him” (1 Kings 22:19, NRSV).

From the perspective of New Testament cosmology what is striking here is that the good and evil beings are all before the Lord together. One of them volunteers to be a “lying spirit” in the mouths of Ahab’s prophets to lead him astray – lead him astray for good reason, to be sure, but still to lead him astray. And Yahweh approves their deceptive plans.

In the decalogue, Yahweh declares: “You shall have no other Elohim before me” (Exod. 20:3). Note that he does not deny the existence of other gods; there simply are to be no other gods in Yahweh’s presence. Thus Baal was the *Elohim* for Tyre and Sidon, just as Rimmon was the *Elohim* for Syria, Chemosh for Moab, and Dagon for the Philistines. Where Israel got in trouble was when they brought Jezebel’s *Elohim* into Israel. Yahweh wasn’t troubled if Baal stayed in Tyre and Sidon, but he had no right to be in Israel! Hence the great battle at Mt. Carmel: Who would be *Elohim* in Israel: Yahweh or Baal?

All of that changed at the cross. Satan no longer had access to the heavenly court as he had in Job. He was now cast down to earth. And as Revelation 12 puts it: “Woe to the earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you with great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!”

The book of Job shows us that there is an evil Spirit abroad on the earth, even if we don’t know it! How true of our lives even today. When an evil event happens, we have to ask ourselves the question? Where is the hand of the Lord (providence) and where is the hand of the devil? There is no clear answer to that question.

**Question:** When disaster strikes us today, how does our situation differ from that of Job’s? Can we see the issues with greater clarity than he did?

**2. The Great Controversy theme: God allows evil to have its day in court.** In a sense, Job’s story is a microcosm of the Great Controversy macrocosm. In short, Satan declares that Job is essentially selfish, and if God were to take away the bribe, he would curse God to his face. That pits selfishness against self-sacrificing love. God allowed Satan to have his day in court to show that it is possible for God’s people to demonstrate disinterested love.

At the beginning of the Great Controversy, something analogous happens as God allows Satan to have his day in court with the creation. God steps back, just as he did in Job and allows Satan to show what selfishness can do on a global scale. The disasters tabulated in Genesis 3 to 11 illustrate the results: Adam and Eve in the Garden, Cain and Abel, the Flood, the Tower of Babel. By the time Abraham comes on the scene, he and his family “worshiped other gods” (Joshua 24:2). At that point God comes back into play more visibly and enters into a covenant with Abraham to show how God’s way is best.

**Question:** How does our witness today, as individuals and as a community of believers, affect the Great Controversy Story? Can we counter the argument from Elihu in Job 35:6-8?

Job 35:6 If you sin, how does that affect him?

If your sins are many, what does that do to him?

7 If you are righteous, what do you give to him,  
or what does he receive from your hand?

8 Your wickedness only affects humans like yourself,  
and your righteousness only other people.

**3. The effect of bad theology on well-meaning friends.** It would appear from Job that Job's three friends really did want to encourage him. But they were so locked into a reward-scheme theology that they ended up tormenting him.

**Question:** To what extent do Christians have a responsibility to others to share a gracious theology that would allow us to be more gracious with one another?

The book of Job itself is a wonderful place to begin in the effort to demonstrate the evils of a reward-based theology. In the chaos of our world, we should be very careful how we pass judgment on others. This quotation from Ellen White is to the point:

Every association of life calls for the exercise of self-control, forbearance, and sympathy. We differ so widely in disposition, habits, education, that our ways of looking at things vary. We judge differently. Our understanding of truth, our ideas in regard to the conduct of life, are not in all respects the same. There are no two whose experience is alike in every particular. The trials of one are not the trials of another. The duties that one finds light are to another most difficult and perplexing.

So frail, so ignorant, so liable to misconception is human nature, that each should be careful in the estimate he places upon another. We little know the bearing of our acts upon the experience of others. What we do or say may seem to us of little moment, when, could our eyes be opened, we should see that upon it depended the most important results for good or for evil. – *Ministry of Healing*, 483

**4. Divine affirmation for struggles endured.** Most of us will never experience the kind of dialogue that Job had with God at the end of his torments. Still, the knowledge that God affirms those who stand firm for him can be a great encouragement. And that is particularly true when we realize that we are in a great struggle and that God needs us. That divine “need” is well illustrated in this quote from C. S. Lewis which reflects on prayers not answered. He quotes first of all an “experienced Christian” and then adds his own reflections in conclusion:

“I have seen many striking answers to prayer and more than one that I thought miraculous. But they usually come at the beginning: before conversion, or soon after it.

As the Christian life proceeds, they tend to be rarer. The refusals, too, are not only more frequent; they become more unmistakable, more emphatic.”

Does God then forsake just those who serve Him best? Well, He who served Him best of all said, near His tortured death, “Why hast thou forsaken me?” When God becomes man, that Man, of all others, is least comforted by God, at His greatest need. There is a mystery here which, even if I had the power, I might not have the courage to explore. Meanwhile, little people like you and me, if our prayers are sometimes granted, beyond all hope and probability, had better not draw hasty conclusions to our own advantage. If we were stronger, we might be less tenderly treated. If we were braver, we might be sent, with far less help, to defend far more desperate posts in the great battle.  
– C. S. Lewis, “The Efficacy of Prayer,” in *The World’s Last Night and Other Essays*, 10-11

**A final rhetorical question:** Can God’s people find in the book of Job the kind of courage to keep on keeping on as Job did?