



Sunday School Lesson Summary for April 2, 2006
Released on: March 29, 2006

"When Tragedy Occurs"

Devotional Reading: **Psalm 22:1-11**
Background Scripture: **Job 1-3**
Printed Text: **Job 1:14-15, 18-19, 22; 3:1-3, 11**

Time: about 2000 B.C.
Place: Land of Uz

Golden Text: "In all this Job did not sin nor charge God with wrong."

Job 1-3 (New King James Version)

Job and His Family in Uz

1 There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was blameless and upright, and one who feared God and shunned evil. 2 And seven sons and three daughters were born to him. 3 Also, his possessions were seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen, five hundred female donkeys, and a very large household, so that this man was the greatest of all the people of the East.

4 And his sons would go and feast in their houses, each on his appointed day, and would send and invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. 5 So it was, when the days of feasting had run their course, that Job would send and sanctify them, and he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all. For Job said, "It may be that my sons have sinned and cursed[a] God in their hearts." Thus Job did regularly.

Satan Attacks Job's Character

6 Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan[b] also came among them. 7 And the LORD said to Satan, "From where do you come?"

So Satan answered the LORD and said, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking back and forth on it."

8 Then the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil?"

9 So Satan answered the LORD and said, "Does Job fear God for nothing? 10 Have You not made a hedge around him, around his household, and around all that he has on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. 11 But now, stretch out Your hand and touch all that he has, and he will surely curse You to Your face!"

12 And the LORD said to Satan, "Behold, all that he has is in your power; only do not lay a hand on his person."

So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD.

Job Loses His Property and Children

13 Now there was a day when his sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house; 14 and a messenger came to Job and said, "The oxen were plowing and the donkeys feeding beside them, 15 when the Sabeans[c] raided them and took them away-indeed they have killed the servants with the edge of the sword; and I alone have escaped to tell you!"

16 While he was still speaking, another also came and said, "The fire of God fell from heaven and burned up the sheep and the servants, and consumed them; and I alone have escaped to tell you!"

17 While he was still speaking, another also came and said, "The Chaldeans formed three bands, raided the camels and took them away, yes, and killed the servants with the edge of the sword; and I alone have escaped to tell you!"

18 While he was still speaking, another also came and said, "Your sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house, 19 and suddenly a great wind came from across[d] the wilderness and struck the four corners of the house, and it fell on the young people, and they are dead; and I alone have escaped to tell you!"

20 Then Job arose, tore his robe, and shaved his head; and he fell to the ground and worshiped. 21 And he said:

" Naked I came from my mother's womb,
And naked shall I return there.
The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away;
Blessed be the name of the LORD."

22 In all this Job did not sin nor charge God with wrong.

Job 2

Satan Attacks Job's Health

1 Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan came also among them to present himself before the LORD. 2 And the LORD said to Satan, "From where do you come?"

Satan answered the LORD and said, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking back and forth on it."

3 Then the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil? And still he holds fast to his integrity, although you incited Me against him, to destroy him without cause."

4 So Satan answered the LORD and said, "Skin for skin! Yes, all that a man has he will give for his life. 5 But stretch out Your hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will surely curse You to Your face!"

6 And the LORD said to Satan, "Behold, he is in your hand, but spare his life."

7 So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD, and struck Job with painful boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. 8 And he took for himself a potsherd with which to scrape himself while he sat in the midst of the ashes.

9 Then his wife said to him, "Do you still hold fast to your integrity? Curse God and die!"

10 But he said to her, "You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?" In all this Job did not sin with his lips.

Job's Three Friends

11 Now when Job's three friends heard of all this adversity that had come upon him, each one came from his own place--Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite. For they had made an appointment together to come and mourn with him, and to comfort him.

12 And when they raised their eyes from afar, and did not recognize him, they lifted their voices and wept; and each one tore his robe and sprinkled dust on his head toward heaven.

13 So they sat down with him on the ground seven days and seven nights, and no one spoke a word to him, for they saw that his grief was very great.

Job 3

Job Deplores His Birth

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

3 "May the day perish on which I was born,
And the night in which it was said,

'A male child is conceived.'

4 May that day be darkness;
May God above not seek it,
Nor the light shine upon it.

5 May darkness and the shadow of death claim it;
May a cloud settle on it;
May the blackness of the day terrify it.

6 As for that night, may darkness seize it;
May it not rejoice[e] among the days of the year,
May it not come into the number of the months.

7 Oh, may that night be barren!
May no joyful shout come into it!

8 May those curse it who curse the day,
Those who are ready to arouse Leviathan.

9 May the stars of its morning be dark;
May it look for light, but have none,
And not see the dawning of the day;

10 Because it did not shut up the doors of my mother's womb,
Nor hide sorrow from my eyes.

11 "Why did I not die at birth?
Why did I not perish when I came from the womb?

12 Why did the knees receive me?
Or why the breasts, that I should nurse?

13 For now I would have lain still and been quiet,
I would have been asleep;
Then I would have been at rest

14 With kings and counselors of the earth,
Who built ruins for themselves,

15 Or with princes who had gold,
Who filled their houses with silver;

16 Or why was I not hidden like a stillborn child,
Like infants who never saw light?

17 There the wicked cease from troubling,
And there the weary are at rest.

18 There the prisoners rest together;
They do not hear the voice of the oppressor.

19 The small and great are there,
And the servant is free from his master.
20 "Why is light given to him who is in misery,
And life to the bitter of soul,
21 Who long for death, but it does not come,
And search for it more than hidden treasures;
22 Who rejoice exceedingly,
And are glad when they can find the grave?
23 Why is light given to a man whose way is hidden,
And whom God has hedged in?
24 For my sighing comes before I eat,[f]
And my groanings pour out like water.
25 For the thing I greatly feared has come upon me,
And what I dreaded has happened to me.
26 I am not at ease, nor am I quiet;
I have no rest, for trouble comes."

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each student will be able to:

Recite the fundamental facts about the person and book of Job.

Discuss the nature of grief and right ways to respond to it.

Make a plan to worship God when personal grief comes.

INTRODUCTION

What is human tragedy? Does it only occur when one finds himself undeservedly on the receiving end of it, or is it possible to bring tragedy upon oneself? According to the Bible, Job did nothing to deserve the predicament we find him in in today's lesson (see Job 1:8, and 2:3). Nonetheless, we are reminded not of the fact that Job suffered great loss, but of how he responded to the same.

In the midst of unexpected calamity (lay-offs, bankruptcy, loss of property, loss of the activity of one's bodily functions, divorce, eviction, rape, the ravages of a drug-addicted spouse or other family member, etc.) Christians should respond differently than those who don't have a relationship with Jesus Christ would respond. Why? Because just as God "hedged in" Job-protecting him from death at the hand of Satan, God also hedges in His children and protects us from certain disaster. While it is true that bad things happen to proverbial "good" people-because none is righteous, we must remember that God gives and He takes away, and we must continually bless Him in all circumstances because of His glory. It's not about us!

LESSON BACKGROUND

The book of Job is the subject of countless opinions. Scholars disagree about the author; some say Job himself wrote it. Others try to make a case for Moses or even Elihu, a friend of Job who appears near the end of the book. Since no author is given, we cannot know for sure. Its value comes from the fact that the book is inspired by God; the value is not dependent on knowing the identity of the human author.

Scholars also differ as to the date. Their estimate ranges from Job's being one of the earliest Old Testament books to one of the last. Even the language is hard to translate. That would be an indication of its being a very old book. A good guess is that Job himself lived sometime in the age of the patriarchs, between 2000 and 1500 B.C. It is possible that the time period of Job himself and the time of the writing of the book are not the same.

Scholars also offer different opinions about the man Job. Was he an Israelite or not? We don't know. We are certain, however, that Job was not a fictitious character (see Ezekiel 14:14, 20; James 5:11). He is described as being from Uz (Job 1:1). This is in the territory of the Edomites, south of Palestine (Lamentations 4:21).

The book of Job depicts Job as a righteous man; he feared God. He turned away from evil. He was good to his neighbors. He worshipped God and offered sacrifices. God himself declared Job to be "a blameless and upright man, one that fears God and shuns evil" (Job 1:8). That will be important to remember as we explore this book. The book of Job is more than just the story of a man with patience-as we have forever heard said, "She has the patience of Job." The book of Job forces us to wrestle with our understanding of-and our response to-suffering.

After chapter one introduces us to Job, we move quickly to an assembly in Heaven. God is there, and standing in His presence are the "sons of God" (Job 1:6). These are probably angels (see also Job 38:7), although they are definitely not "sons of God" in the same sense as Jesus (see Hebrews 1:5).

Among the angels is one called Satan, which means "adversary" or "accuser." (It is more of a title than a name.) God brags about Job, but Satan accuses God of taking it easy on that man. Satan tells God that Job's faithfulness is understandable considering all the material blessings God has given him. Satan then proclaims that Job will curse God to His face if God makes Job's life difficult (Job 1:11). Consequently, the Lord grants Satan permission to oppress Job. "Behold, all that he has is in your power, only do not lay a hand on his person" (Job 1:12 NKJV).

JOB'S CALAMITY (Job 1:14-15, 18-19, 22)

1. In what time period is it believed that Job lived?

Job lived in the land of Uz, which was a territory to the east of Canaan. Scholars do not know for certain what time period Job lived in, but it seems likely that he lived at about the time of the patriarchs of Israel; that is, he lived during the time of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

2. What happened in the first round of disaster to strike Job? (Job 1:13-15)

These verses show where Job's children were gathered together for one of their times of feasting. However, the first round of disaster did not concern Job's sons and daughters, but rather his possessions. In the ancient world wealth was generally measured by land, domesticated animals, and the number of servants one possessed. "The oxen were plowing and the donkeys feeding beside them, when the Sabeans raided them and took them away-indeed they have killed the servants with the edge of the sword" is what one of Job's surviving servant/messengers told him in verses 14 and 15.

3. Who were the perpetrators of the first attack on Job? (Job 1:15)

The Sabeans were a gang of raiders who stole Job's animals and killed his servants. These people may have been from the land of Sheba in southwest Arabia-present day Yemen. They engaged in caravan trading, which would account for their being so far from home. They obviously did not confine themselves to peaceful commerce! (It is possible that there were other Sabeans already headquartered in northern Arabia, closer to where Job lived. These Sabeans would then have been more like local raiders.)

4. Why is it that the attacks on Job almost seem invented?

Job's attacks almost seem invented because in a sense they really were. Satan brought Job's losses in a rapid-fire and uniform way that was sure to put Job's faith to the sternest test. The author of this historical account has also arranged the material so that we can better understand the overwhelming nature of these calamities. There could be no question of mere coincidence. Job would be compelled to consider what in the world was going on. There will be times in our lives when we will think similarly to Job and wonder, "Lord, why are these things being allowed to happen to me? Are you testing my faith? Is there a lesson to be learned at the end of all this? Can I expect a great blessing as a result?"

5. How is it that the attacks on Job can be said to have come from all directions? (Job 1:18-19)

John Hartley, author of *The Book of Job* (Eerdmans), observes that each of the four calamitous events affecting Job came from one of the four points of the compass. The Chaldeans that "formed three bands (and) raided the camels and took them away..., and killed the servants" (v. 17) came from the north. The Sabeans who "raided" Job's "oxen (that) were plowing and the donkeys feeding beside them" (v. 14) came from the south. The wind that killed Job's sons and daughters "came from across the wilderness" (v. 19) or from the east. Finally, the lightning that formed in a Mediterranean storm and that was called "fire of God (falling) from heaven (burning) up the sheep and the servants (consuming) them" (v. 16) came from the west. Job was attacked from the north, south, east, and west. Hartley adds that "the number

four also symbolizes full measure, totality."

6. How did Job demonstrate his righteousness in his response to his children's deaths? (Job 1:22)

Already in shock over the loss of his property, Job was in a weakened state when he received the worst news a parent can receive—the death of his seven sons and three daughters. We might well wonder how we would react in the face of this sorrow. For his part, Job maintained a remarkably good attitude at this point. He acknowledged that everything he possessed had come from God, who had the right to do with His gifts as He saw fit. Job maintained a spirit of worship and praise. He refused to accuse God of acting sinfully in the things that had happened to him. To have done so would have been foolish, for it would have involved a failure to remember God's character and man's place in the world.

7. What accounts for Job's change of attitude in chapter three? (Job 3:1-3)

There are a number of factors at work. Not ready to give up, Satan had received God's permission for a second attack on Job, this time affecting his physical health (2:4-5). Job was afflicted with painful boils all over his body. As anyone who has experienced intense and prolonged pain will know, there are few sterner tests of spiritual steadfastness.

There were other factors at work in Job's life. His wife was not an encouragement. Beset by grief herself, she told Job, in effect, to just give up and forget about God (2:9). Job rejected this idea, but it certainly did not make maintaining a right spirit any easier.

The simple passage of time was another force at work with Job. Sometimes we can find great strength to face troubles when they first appear; but with time, grief and pain have a way of wearing down our spiritual defenses. For at least a week, and probably much longer, Job had been dealing with his seemingly ruined life. Apparently he had reached a breaking point. He began to pour out his despair to the friends who had gathered around him.

JOB'S SADNESS (Job 3:1-3, 11)

8. What can we learn from the way Job spoke in chapter 3?

We must acknowledge that the attitude Job's words express is not one that should habitually mark God's children. Some Bible commentators have been quite strident in their criticisms of Job. Matthew Henry declared that "unless (Job's words) had been better, it would... have been well if he had kept them to himself" (Commentary on the Whole Bible, Hendrickson). Henry continued, "To curse the day of our own birth because... we entered upon the calamitous scene of life is to quarrel with the God of nature, to despise the dignity of our being, and to indulge a passion which our own calm and sober thoughts will make us ashamed of."

We must remember, however, the extreme duress that Job was experiencing. He is

certainly not the only believer who has had dark thoughts. For example, the Prophet Jeremiah spoke similar words (see Jeremiah 20:14-18).

9. What can we learn from what Job did not do in response to his circumstances?

When evaluating Job's words, we must also bear in mind what he did not do. Although he cursed the day of his birth, he did not curse God, as his wife would have had him do. And despite his weariness of life, he showed no inclination to commit suicide. He was in an angry mood, but we can still see evidence of godliness.

God is not surprised or shocked when we express our anger at life. He is big enough to handle it. He knows all about our weaknesses (see Psalm 103:14). He wants us to maintain a relationship with Him by being honest with Him about how we feel.

10. What should Job's example encourage us to be?

Job's example should encourage us to be honest with God. "Job rightly grieves his bereavement; he is authentically depressed by his illness. He is human. The untrammelled serenity which some prescribe as the goal of 'victorious living' is a negation of whole areas of our experience" (in Zuck, ed., *Sitting with Job*, Baker). The road to glorifying and loving God can be a rocky one.

Job's sufferings led him to think that life did not have any joy. A key point, though, is that he did not give up trying to find the truth. God wants us to turn to Him in times of despair. As would happen with Job, our dark times can lead us to a closer relationship with God.

CONCLUSION

Job brings us face-to-face with one of Christianity's greatest challenges: If God is good, then why does He allow the innocent to suffer? It was not God who brought the problems into Job's life-but neither did God interfere with Satan as he oppressed Job.

Sometimes suffering comes about as a direct consequence of the personal choices that people make (example: contracting a sexually transmitted infection through immoral behavior). Sometimes God Himself inflicts suffering because of sin (example: Ezekiel 32:1-15). But at other times, as with Job, the suffering is unexplainable from an earthly point of view. God may have a bigger plan in mind that we can't see. (In Job's case we can see it but he can't.) In such instances we continue to trust God above all else (Job 13:15; 19:25). Job thought the solution to his problem was more knowledge (see Job 13:23; 23:5). But that was not God's viewpoint.

We should notice in passing that Satan is limited. He cannot do anything that God will not allow him to do. In the end even the devil must honor God's sovereignty. Satan has tried to put God down through Job. But, ultimately it is Satan who is proven wrong.

Although Job eventually passes his tests, this lesson does not end on a high note. We will have to wait for the next two lessons (April 9 and 16) to have a more satisfactory conclusion. Still, our lesson displays the great faith of Job. Even in despair he does not make foolish statements nor does he take foolish actions.

Many do not follow Job's example, but some do. Arthur John Gossip was the preacher at Beechgrove church in Aberdeen, Scotland. In 1927 he lost his wife quite suddenly. His congregation was curious as to what he would say on his first day back in the pulpit. His sermon title was "When Life Tumbles In-What Then?" That sermon has become a classic. It appears in many sermons collections and frequently is studied in seminaries. While that sermon displays an extraordinary use of language and organization, it is a classic because it deals with fresh grief.

Arthur John Gossip communicated that when all is lost, we must turn to God. Gossip said, "I do not understand this life of ours. But still less can I comprehend how people in trouble and loss and bereavement can fling away peevishly from the Christian faith. In God's name, fling to what? Have we not lost enough without losing that too?"

By drawing the curtain aside and showing us what happens in heaven, the book of Job helps us deal with personal problems on this earth. By resisting the quick and ungodly solutions offered by Satan and holding patiently to God's promises, we too can be victorious over life's tragedies.

When we face personal tragedies, we are pulled in opposite directions. We are tempted to be pulled downward and be persuaded by Satan to despair. But, Scripture teaches us to look upward and trust God in spite of our trying circumstances.

PRACTICAL POINTS

Earthly possessions are subject to being torn from us by earthly thieves; only eternal riches are eternally secure (Job 1:14-15).

Those we love in this life may be parted from us without warning; but Jesus is forever our constant Friend and Brother (vs. 18-19).

When tragedy strikes, a righteous man and woman of faith will silently humble himself/herself before God (vs. 22).

When a deep tragedy weighs on his mind, even a righteous person may be driven to despair (3:1-2).

Even the faithful can express distress and bitterness (vs. 3).

The troubles of life can cause us to question God, but in the end they should strengthen our faith (vs. 11)

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

The ultimate loss is to reject God.

PRAYER

Dear Lord, like Your servant Job, we often do not understand why we are being allowed to suffer. Like Job we struggle with many whys in life. When tragedy does come, may it draw us closer to You so that we may overcome it. In the name of

Jesus-who also suffered, albeit unjustly-amen.

ANTICIPATING NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

As Job's pessimistic comments on the state of his existence continued, his three so-called comforters tried to fix the blame for Job's condition on him. He endured discourses by Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar. These were followed by a long discourse by Elihu. These all illustrated the fact that even well-intended human solutions fail in comparison to divine remedies for life's tragedies.

In preparation for next week's lesson, read Job 14:1-22; 32:1-8; 34:10-15; and 37:14-24 (Golden Text: Job 14:14). That lesson will deal with "Searching for Hope-When All Seems Hopeless."

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