

Pine Knoll Sabbath School Study Notes

Fourth Quarter 2016: *The Book of Job*

Lesson 7 “Retributive Punishment”

Read for this week’s study

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

Memory Text

“ ‘Can you search out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limits of the Almighty?’ ” (Job 11:7, NKJV).

Lesson Outline from Adult Sabbath School Study Guide

- I. Introduction
- II. More Accusations
- III. Less Than Your Iniquity Deserves
- IV. Divine Retribution
- V. If the Lord Creates a New Thing
- VI. The Second Death
- VII. Further Study

Questions and Notes for Consideration

Facilitator: Jon Paulien

1. The irony of Job’s friends is that they are strongly motivated in their comments to defend God’s reputation. Does God need defending? When we seek to defend God, is it possible to repeat the mistakes of Job’s friends? How would we recognize that we are doing this and what would we need to do differently? (Sabbath afternoon)
2. Read Job 8:1-22. What is Bildad’s argument in these verses? Is there truth in what he is saying? If what he is saying is true in the broadest sense, what aspects of the current situation make his “truths” untrue? What can we learn from this chapter about dealing with the faults of others? (Sunday’s lesson)
3. Read Job 11:1-20. What is right with what Zophar is saying, but what is wrong with his overall argument? What is the major missing piece in Zophar’s argument? How is his argument similar or different from what God Himself is saying in chapters 38-41? Why is it right there and wrong here? Does knowing the truth about God ensure that we will reflect His character to others? What is the most powerful way to reflect God’s character to others? (Monday’s lesson)

4. Read Genesis 6:5-8. The book of Job doesn't indicate how much Job and his friends might have known about the Flood, but if they did, how did its story influence their theology? Is suffering *always* the natural consequence of people's actions? How can God's punishing judgments be redemptive? (Tuesday's lesson)
5. Read Genesis 18:20-32 and 19:24-25. Was the judgment on Sodom retributive or redemptive? What implications do the judgments in the Flood and the Sodom story have for the final resolution of evil in the universe? (Tuesday's lesson)
6. Read Deuteronomy 6:24-25. What is the connection between obedience and positive outcomes in life? If doing good enables us to receive good, how is that different from the theology of Job's friends? Read Numbers 16:1-33. What does this incident teach us about the judgments of God? What does this passage tell us about God Himself? What does the choice of all these examples in a series on Job tell us about the author of the lesson? What is his overarching purpose in these? How well does he succeed? (Wednesday's lesson)
7. The annihilation of the wicked at the End is not an "emergency measure." Does it matter at that point how God accomplishes this? Is Ezekiel 28:18-19 helpful in understanding this? Read 2 Peter 3:5-7. What is the lesson author's purpose in choosing this text here? What is his argument and how helpful do you find it? (Thursday's lesson)
8. How can we be sure that someone's suffering is direct punishment from God or not? If we can't be sure, what is the best approach to take with that suffering person? Or even with our own suffering? How many different causes of suffering can you think of? How helpful is it to review such options with a suffering person? (Thursday's lesson)
9. Friday's lesson has an extensive Ellen White quotation drawn from the *SDA Bible Commentary*, volume 3, page 1140. What implications does this statement have for human suffering? (Friday's lesson)
10. The book of Job makes it clear that we don't fully understand the reasons for human suffering in any particular situation. How should this realization help us to be more compassionate with those who are suffering? (Friday's lesson)

Thoughts from Graham Maxwell

Lou: Let's start with a question having to do with this matter of wrath and punishment. Our questioner writes, "Do you think the concept of wrath and punishment has a useful purpose, in that it helps us to remember the importance of remaining in harmony with God's truthfulness and trustworthiness?" You've commented a bit on that, but say we review again what purpose these words and these thoughts might have.

Graham: God has obviously used them many, many times. They have been useful to him. But to settle for that is so regrettable. It is true, when Israel was noisy and irreverent, God had to

strike a little fear into their hearts in the sense of terror, and then mixed with the terror there was a measure of reverence and respect. But you notice when our reverence is based on fear only, the moment the thunder dies away, the reverence evaporates. And Jesus really demonstrated this when he sat on the Mount of Olives. No thunder, no lightning, no earthquake, and he quietly wept over the city. They despised him. I do love it, though, that the children are never afraid of him. They would sit in His lap, and one description says they would “reach up and kiss that pensive face.”

Lou: Is this wrath and punishment and so forth, is that what you are speaking about when you talk about emergency measures?

Graham: Those are emergency measures.

Lou: Or the picture of you standing on the desk throwing the chalk and the erasers to get our attention?

Graham: That would be an emergency measure; not the regular way of doing it. That’s right. And we have a whole evening coming on emergency measures.

Lou: This same person went on to ask, “Do you feel comfortable re-reading passages like Revelation 14:10?”

Graham: The third angel’s message? It’s significant that the last great message from the angels is about the destruction of the wicked.

Lou: It has some pretty strong language.

Graham: Very strong language. It seems to me, it’s God’s last message of warning and the invitation before the end. And things have become so desperate that he raises his voice that high. It would be like a father walking with his son up in the mountains, and the son is getting closer and closer to the cliff. At first the father says, “Son, stop right where you are.” But he doesn’t hear. He raises his voice, but the wind is blowing it away. So finally the father at the top of his lungs shouts to the boy, “Stop where you are.” And on the trail a group following say to themselves, “Listen to that heartless Father bellowing at his poor little boy.” Later on when they get closer and learn the truth they say, “Forgive us; we misunderstood.” I think many of us may owe God an apology. I’m glad he’s raised his voice. We needed it.

Lou: Revelation 14 is something that tells us about how dangerous the cliff is.

Graham: In the strongest terms in all Scripture. But I like the fact that the one who wrote that, is the one who wrote, “There is no fear in love. Perfect love casts out all fear.” This is the beloved disciple. He knew what he was doing. So we can understand that God is love and still understand the need for earthquake, wind and fire. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, Conversations About God, #9 with Lou Venden, “There is no Need to be Afraid of God”

recorded March, 1984, Loma Linda, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link: <http://pkp.cc/9MMCAG>*

Lou: We have had more questions in this area. For instance, one of our friends wrote: “If God does not punish, then who sends the fire down from Heaven on the wicked?” Now you’ve already alluded to that. Who caused Ananias and Sapphira to fall dead?

Graham: I would want to make a difference between the two deaths. Ananias and Sapphira, that’s what the Bible calls the first death, and they will be resurrected. And what their future is, is between them and God. It’s this awful death at the end. Now, when fire comes down from God and consumes them, God is there, no doubt about it.

But as we have discussed before, this is his life-giving Glory which is described in the Bible as having the appearance of fire. It’s life-giving. In fact, if we were among the saved, we would have been living in this life-giving Glory for a thousand years, and it doesn’t hurt anybody. It’s only if we’re willfully and rebelliously out of harmony with God. God in mercy has veiled this life-giving Glory. His “strange act,” sometimes so called, is when he ceases to veil his life-giving glory, and this earth is no longer a dark place, but his glory fills the earth and all that is out of harmony is consumed. He doesn’t turn his back on this. He’s there. He’s watching his children. It’s his glory. But he’s not torturing his dying children to death. That’s the difference. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, Conversations About God, #20 with Lou Venden, “At Peace with our Heavenly Father” recorded June, 1984, Loma Linda, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link: <http://pkp.cc/20MMCAG>*

Lou: Last week, someone wanted to ask this question: “Could the word ‘wrath’ have been translated differently, as in the three angels’ messages? Could there have been a better word than ‘wrath’ used?”

Graham: Hmm. That’s an interesting question. That’s a limitation of human language. The word is “*orge*” which just did mean wrath, even fury. God is limited to our human language with all the hazards thereunto appertaining. And so we have to take the whole context to understand. The question there that appeals to me most is, “Why would God use the word at all, if he does not wish to be understood as angry?” It seems to me that he has left the impression that he is angry with us, and I would have to compare that with a father’s conversation with his little girl. Say you’ve tried everything else under the sun to persuade her not to help herself to cookies at three in the afternoon and it hasn’t worked. But finally you put this little youngster in front of you, and you know how it is with the little daughters; we both have them, and how cute and innocent they can look, even in the midst of iniquity. That’s true! And you say, “Look, if you do that one more time, Daddy’s going to be very, very cross with you.”

Now, don't smile when you say that, because she doesn't know what "cross" means. She can't look it up in *Webster's*. She knows what "cross" means by the look on your face and the tone of your voice. So you feel like a bully. Here's this little, tiny child with pigtails, and you're saying, "Daddy will be very, very cross with you."

And a little later, you thought you had impressed her adequately; you find her tiptoeing around the corner and reaching up and taking another cookie. And it's so cute; you wish you had your camera. And then you suddenly realize, no, this is the time for some stern discipline. And you put this helpless little girl in front of you. She puts her hands behind her and assumes that posture that little girls can, and you as a big brute say, "Daddy told you that if you did that one more time, he'd be very, very cross." You have to look cross, sound cross. Don't glance over to your wife, you know, or you'll melt. You've got to go through with this thing.

I think it's a matter of communication. And God has dealt with children. We've been the immature children.

He even has to say, "Do that one more time and I will be furious with you! And I wish I didn't have to say that one more time." So I think our human experience helps us to understand the Scripture. Parents and teachers and little ones are in the best position to read the Bible sympathetically, it seems to me. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, *Conversations About God*, #9 with Lou Venden, "There is no Need to be Afraid of God" recorded March, 1984, Loma Linda, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link: <http://pkp.cc/9MMCAG>*

Which shows greater love? To refuse to raise one's voice lest the children be made afraid? Or to run the risk of being feared and thought undignified in order to save the children in your care?

God runs this same risk every time he disciplines His people. "For the Lord disciplines those whom he loves." (See Hebrews 12:6)

"Disciplines" is a better translation than the *King James Version* "chasteneth," which suggests only the idea of punishment. The original Greek word is not limited to this. It means to "educate," "train," "correct," "discipline"—all of which may call for occasional punishment, to be sure, but always for the purpose of instruction.

This explanation of the loving purpose of God's discipline is included in yet another of Solomon's proverbs:

*My child, do not despise the Lord's discipline
or be weary of his reproof,
for the Lord reproves the one he loves,
as a father the son in whom he delights.* (Proverbs 3:11, 12, NRSV)

The book of Hebrews cites this proverb and then urges God's children not to overlook the encouraging meaning. "God is treating you as sons. Can anyone be a son and not be disciplined by his father? If you escape the discipline in which all sons share, you must be illegitimate and not true sons. Again, we paid due respect to our human fathers who disciplined us; should we not submit even more readily to our spiritual Father, and so attain life? They disciplined us for a short time as they thought best; but he does so for our true welfare, so that we may share his holiness. Discipline, to be sure, is never pleasant; at the time it seems painful, but afterwards those who have been trained by it reap the harvest of a peaceful and upright life." (Hebrews 12:7-11, REB) {Maxwell, Graham. *Servants or Friends*, 33-34. Redlands, California: Pine Knoll Publications, 1992.}

<http://www.pineknoll.org/graham/sof/chapter3.html>

Friends understand the need for punishment. They know that God disciplines those whom he loves. Discipline is for the purpose of correction and instruction, and friends trust God to discipline them when they need it. And they do not chafe under such discipline, as servants are more likely to do. They know that God's discipline is always for their best good. "Thank you, God, I needed that," is the grateful response of a friend.

But destruction is not discipline. *Destruction does not discipline the one destroyed.* And to prolong the pain of the execution teaches him nothing. His life is done.

Then would God extend the suffering to say something to the ones looking on? Will saints in the kingdom, as they watch the agony of the lost, be saying to their heavenly Father, "Thank you, God, we needed that. Justice demanded that they be punished like this, and we needed to watch it happen. Besides, if that's what you really do to sinners, you can count on us to be very obedient for the rest of eternity!"

That's the obedience that comes from fear, the obedience of trembling servants who simply do what they're told. It would not be the free cooperation of understanding friends, that God so much desires. And what do you think God's friends would be saying as they watched the wicked die? {Maxwell, Graham. *Servants or Friends*, 110-111. Redlands, California: Pine Knoll Publications, 1992.}

<http://www.pineknoll.org/graham/sof/chapter8.html>

The great truth revealed throughout the whole Bible—including the many difficult stories we so often pass lightly by—is that though God greatly desires that we do things His way, and though He is deeply disappointed when we rebel, yet He will not force us. For He created us free, and

He will never do anything to damage our individuality, our power to think and to do. God is not seeking to weaken and destroy His image within us but rather to heal and restore.

Is one really free, though, when he comes to know God? Doesn't God impose many restrictions upon His people? Are there not many things a good Christian must not do? How can this be called real freedom?

Perhaps one could look at it this way. God has created this universe to operate in a certain way, according to certain orderly processes of His wise design. He then invites us people, to whom He has given life, so to live in His universe, so to eat, sleep, exercise, work, study, associate together, and worship together, that we shall be healthy, intelligent, happy people, and finally shall never die but be free to live forever and travel throughout the universe and enjoy all the good things God has made.

But we don't have to do this if we don't want to.

If we prefer, we can weaken our bodies; we can pervert our minds; we can corrupt our souls. For God has created us capable of doing this—so great was His desire for the companionship of free individuals who would love and trust Him because they wanted to.

Of course, if we choose to be disorderly in God's orderly universe, we can hardly expect to avoid the ruinous consequences.

The man who takes poison expects to die. He has chosen to.

On the other hand, I feel it no limitation of my freedom that I must eat to live, or that I must accept Christ to be saved. Because I want to live, and I want to be saved. Besides, eating is pleasant and accepting Christ brings great joy.

The man who bails out at 10,000 feet doesn't have to pull the rip cord. He's free. He can choose to die. Perhaps he sees this as a chance to show his independence of the rules. But he had better pull that cord if he wants to remain free to fly again another day.

If I choose to be careless with my health, God will not punish me with weakness and disease. The violation of the laws of life brings its own costly results.

If I choose to fill my lungs with smoke, God will not punish me with cancer. In this orderly universe in which we live, such indulgence may produce that dread disease.

If I choose to neglect the regular and thoughtful study of the Bible, God will not hate or destroy me. But I shall reap the natural consequences of breaking contact with my God, of closing my eyes to saving truth, of turning my back on the One who would heal. God will respect my decision, if I prefer to go it alone.

Some may object that the orderliness of God's universe leaves man hardly any choice but to obey. "Be orderly or reap the consequences" seems to be the inviolable rule.

But what freedom would there be if order should give way to chaos, if nothing could be counted on to remain the same? What use would be the power of choice if today's food should be tomorrow's poison, if planting corn might produce pansies or who knows what?

Is it fair or reasonable to expect the universe to be orderly only when we wish, as when engineering a new bridge or planning a flight to outer space?

"Make no mistake about this," Paul wrote to the Galatians: "God is not to be fooled; a man reaps what he sows. If he sows seed in the field of his lower nature, he will reap from it a harvest of corruption, but if he sows in the field of the Spirit, the Spirit will bring him a harvest of eternal life." Galatians 6:7, 8, NEB.

Orderliness works both ways, for good or for ill. And God would spare us the consequences of disorderliness when He warns that the final wages of persistent disorder is death. Romans 6:23. {Maxwell, A. Graham. *I Want to be Free*, 9-11. Mountain View, California: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1970}

There is perhaps one further question to consider. Doesn't it seem that in Old Testament times God frequently ordered His people to do certain things and threatened to punish them if they disobeyed? Do you call that freedom?

If as parents you found it necessary to keep a bottle of deadly poison in your garage, would you put it on the highest shelf Out of reach of the children? Would you warn them not to touch? Might you even threaten to spank them if they disobeyed?

Would this be robbing the children of their freedom or depriving them of their right to drink that poison? Little children need protection, lest in their ignorance and immaturity they squander their chance to grow up and be fully free.

"Spiritual babes," as Paul calls inexperienced Christians, need similar protection. Thus the Bible contains many stories of how God dealt very firmly with His unruly children. "For the Lord disciplines him whom He loves, and chastises every son whom He receives." Hebrews 12:6, RSV.

Some have concluded from this that God wants us always to remain spiritual children. On the contrary, Ephesians 4:11-15 and Hebrews 5:11 to 6:3 seem to indicate that God wants us to grow up to maturity, to become people who can exercise their freedom in a responsible way, people who gratefully acknowledge their freedom in the universe and who are not afraid to be individuals. {Maxwell, A. Graham. *I Want to be Free*, 13-14. Mountain View, California: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1970}

Further Study with Ellen White

God never asks us to believe, without giving sufficient evidence upon which to base our faith. His existence, His character, the truthfulness of His word, are all established by testimony that appeals to our reason; and this testimony is abundant. Yet God has never removed the possibility of doubt. Our faith must rest upon evidence, not demonstration. Those who wish to doubt will have opportunity; while those who really desire to know the truth will find plenty of evidence on which to rest their faith. {SC 105.2}

It is impossible for finite minds fully to comprehend the character or the works of the Infinite One. To the keenest intellect, the most highly educated mind, that holy Being must ever remain clothed in mystery. "Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is as high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell; what canst thou know?" Job 11:7, 8. {SC 105.3}

We are not to regard God as waiting to punish the sinner for his sin. The sinner brings the punishment upon himself. His own actions start a train of circumstances that bring the sure result. Every act of transgression reacts upon the sinner, works in him a change of character, and makes it more easy for him to transgress again. By choosing to sin, men separate themselves from God, cut themselves off from the channel of blessing, and the sure result is ruin and death. {1SM 235.2}

Satan is constantly at work, with intense energy and under a thousand disguises, to misrepresent the character and government of God. With extensive, well-organized plans and marvelous power, he is working to hold the inhabitants of the world under his deceptions. God, the One infinite and all-wise, sees the end from the beginning, and in dealing with evil His plans were far-reaching and comprehensive. It was His purpose, not merely to put down the rebellion, but to demonstrate to all the universe the nature of the rebellion. God's plan was unfolding, showing both His justice and His mercy, and fully vindicating His wisdom and righteousness in His dealings with evil. {PP 78.3}

God destroys no man. Everyone who is destroyed will have destroyed himself. Everyone who stifles the admonitions of conscience is sowing the seeds of unbelief, and these will produce a sure harvest. {COL 84.4}

But when men pass the limits of divine forbearance, that restraint is removed. God does not stand toward the sinner as an executioner of the sentence against transgression; but he leaves the rejecters of his mercy to themselves, to reap that which they have sown. {GC88 36.2}

No soul is ever finally deserted of God, given up to his own ways, so long as there is any hope of his salvation. "Man turns from God, not God from him." Our heavenly Father follows us with appeals and warnings and assurances of compassion, until further opportunities and privileges would be wholly in vain. The responsibility rests with the sinner. By resisting the Spirit of God

today, he prepares the way for a second resistance of light when it comes with mightier power. Thus he passes on from one stage of resistance to another, until at last the light will fail to impress, and he will cease to respond in any measure to the Spirit of God. {MB 93.1}

We want all to understand how the soul is destroyed. It is not that God sends out a decree that man shall not be saved. He does not throw a darkness before the eyes which cannot be penetrated. But man at first resists a motion of the Spirit of God, and, having once resisted, it is less difficult to do so the second time, less the third, and far less the fourth. {5T 120.2}

Christ is ready to set us free from sin, but He does not force the will; and if by persistent transgression the will itself is wholly bent on evil, and we do not desire to be set free, if we will not accept His grace, what more can He do? We have destroyed ourselves by our determined rejection of His love. {SC 34.2}

This is not an act of arbitrary power on the part of God. The rejecters of His mercy reap that which they have sown. God is the fountain of life; and when one chooses the service of sin, he separates from God, and thus cuts himself off from life. He is "alienated from the life of God." Christ says, "All they that hate Me love death." Ephesians 4:18; Proverbs 8:36. God gives them existence for a time that they may develop their character and reveal their principles. This accomplished, they receive the results of their own choice. By a life of rebellion, Satan and all who unite with him place themselves so out of harmony with God that His very presence is to them a consuming fire. The glory of Him who is love will destroy them. {DA 764.1}

The light of the glory of God, which imparts life to the righteous, will slay the wicked. {DA 107.4}