

Pine Knoll Sabbath School Study Notes
First Quarter 2025: *God's Love and Justice*
Lesson 7 "The Problem of Evil"

Read for this week's study

Job 30:26; Matthew 27:46; Job 38:1–12; Psalm 73; Genesis 2:16, 17; Revelation 21:3, 4.

Memory Text

" 'And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away' " (Revelation 21:4, NKJV).

Lesson Outline from Adult Sabbath School Study Guide

- I. Introduction
- II. "How Long, O Lord?"
- III. "There Are Many Things We Do Not Know"
- IV. The Skeptical Theist
- V. The Free Will Defense
- VI. Love and Evil?
- VII. Further Study

Questions and Notes for Consideration

Facilitator: Jon Paulien

1. This week's lesson summarizes the challenging topic in these words: "If God is all-good and all-powerful, why is there so much evil in the world?" Ellen White comments: "To many minds the origin of sin and the reason for its existence are a source of great perplexity." GC 492. The author of the lesson asserts in response, "The God of the Bible is entirely good, and we can trust Him—even despite the evil that so infects our fallen world." Do you agree with this claim? What would you add to make it more convincing to atheists and agnostics? (Sabbath Afternoon's Lesson)
2. While the above challenge is very current, the Bible is very familiar with the problem of evil. Read Job 30:26, Psalm 10:1, Isaiah 12:1, Jeremiah 13:22, and Malachi 2:17. How would you answer some of the questions raised in these texts, such as "*Why do the wicked prosper? Why do the righteous suffer so much? Where is God when evil*

- happens? Why does God seem to keep His distance when trouble comes?"* (Sunday's Lesson)
3. Read Matthew 27:46. How do you understand Jesus' words here? How do you think God is and was impacted by becoming flesh? How did Jesus deal with this spiritual crisis (Luke 23:46)? (Sunday's Lesson)
 4. Read Job 38:1-12? How does this answer Job's questions? What is the point of God's bombardment of questions? Why doesn't God tell Job about His encounter with Satan in the heavenly council? What is the message for us? Read Job 42:3. What does Job's response tell us about our own understanding of God's ways? Why is it so difficult for many people to live with unanswered questions? (Monday's Lesson)
 5. Read Isaiah 55:8-9. We cannot even imagine the complexities of God's plan for history. Given this, why should we expect to be in a position to know just what God's reasons are for what He does in specific circumstances? The lesson author advocates something he calls "skeptical theism". What do you think he means by that? (Tuesday's Lesson)
 6. A strong parallel to the book of Job is Psalm 73. How does the Psalmist talk about the evil and injustice around him? What does he find out that changes his mind? How does the Adventist view of the sanctuary help? (Tuesday's Lesson)
 7. One explanation for the problem of evil is the "free will defense". God is not to blame for evil because evil is caused by the free will of God's creatures. But if free will is the cause of all the evil in the world, why did God create it? Read Genesis 2:16-17. How do these verses describe the freedom God granted to Adam and Eve? Why do you think so many people teach that human beings have no real freedom, that all our actions are programmed by genetics and past behaviors? (Wednesday's Lesson)
 8. Read Deuteronomy 7:12-13, Joshua 24:14-15, and Psalm 81:11-14. What do these verses tell us about human free will? Would you trade in your dog for a robot dog that doesn't need to be fed or watered, doesn't make messes, and is completely obedient? Why or why not? What does that tell us about God's decisions in creation? (Wednesday's Lesson)
 9. So, let's summarize: Why did God grant His creatures free will when there was so much risk involved? If love cannot be commanded, how come the Bible has so many commandments? Read Romans 8:18 and Revelation 21:3-4. How do these texts deal with the problem of evil? (Thursday's Lesson)
 10. Why was Satan's rebellion not dealt with at the time that he rebelled. Wouldn't that have saved a lot of heartache for many centuries? (Friday's Lesson)

Thoughts from Graham Maxwell

Lou: One of our congregation went out of her way to type up the question that she has had for a number of years. She says this: "Can you give a reason why a loving God would allow a good Christian woman to be murdered? She was a good help in her small church. She was the treasurer of her church. The last Sabbath of her life they had a consecration service at the church. She dedicated herself anew to God, and she was murdered that afternoon at her house. She was the treasurer, and she had money at her house, and apparently that was the reason that someone broke in and she was killed." And this individual says, "The reason I know about this is that she was my sister."

Graham: Again, happy the person who knows God very well at a time like this. It doesn't mean that we would know the answer. I don't think Job ever found out why those things happened to him that did. But all he knew was that those theologians were wrong. And those theologians came to Job and said, "You cannot be asking God about this." I mean, Job was crying to God with intense feeling and saying, "God, how can You do this to me? I've been Your good friend all this time, and now You won't even speak to me. You won't explain this." And the theologians were going on with their very legalistic explanation. Finally he said, "I wish you brethren would be quiet. I appreciate your coming, but you're not helping me at all." None of their explanations were good. He said, "If only I could talk to God, I'm sure I could clear this up." And eventually the boldness of his inquires of God reached such a level that those three men were worried for their friend that God would surely zap him on the spot for daring to inquire. And God broke in and said, "Job, you have said of Me what is right."

So if a person is wrestling with this, we may not find out. I'm sure we won't find out the answer to every such absolutely unfair thing that happens on this planet during this emergency. But some things we know for sure; the kind of person God is, and that He welcomes us to lodge our inquires with feeling, and hopefully we will trust Him enough to wait for the answer.

Lou: Acquainted well enough to trust when we don't know how to answer all these things.

Graham: That's the thing. And I'd like to think that that sister was such a saint; don't worry about her. She will arise in the resurrection and say, "What am I doing here?" She will have no complaints. She'll be looking for her sister. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, Conversations About God, #6 with Lou Venden, "Evaluating the Evidence" recorded February 1984, Loma Linda, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link: <http://pkp.cc/6MMCAG>*

Lou: I gather that Job is a favorite character of yours.

Graham: Yes.

Lou: You refer to him so frequently. And yet the question comes up; why would you use Job as a model, since at the end of the book he talks about repenting?

Graham: That's right.

Lou: And repenting sounds like somebody who has been wrong and is saying, "I'm sorry. I'm a sinner." How could Job be a good model when he is repenting?

Graham: A lot of folk, I think, misunderstand Job by closing with that statement. Job says, "I repent." And they say, "The friends were right; they said he should repent." See, many people read Job and side with the friends. Those who take, if I may say, the narrow, legal view are more comfortable with the friends. But they fail to read on. After Job says, "I repent," God says, "Don't. You have done a beautiful job. You have said of Me what is right and those theologians have not."

So then I go back and ask, "Why did Job say 'I repent'?"

"God," he says, "I have spoken of many things beyond my understanding. I wouldn't say it the same way next time."

God says, "Look, We're sympathetic up here. You've lost your family, lost your estate, lost your reputation and you are sitting on a dung heap with your clothes torn and your body covered with boils. We didn't expect eloquent speeches from you. We think under the circumstances you did magnificently, Job! We couldn't be more proud of you. You have said of Me what is right."

But Job says—wouldn't you say at the end of the best sermon you ever preached, "I'm sorry I didn't do a better job"? I would.

Lou: Yes.

Graham: Well, I think that's all Job said. "I wish I had done a better job." {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, Conversations About God, #18 with Lou Venden, "God Waits for His Children to Grow Up" 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/18MMCAG>*

Lou: Well, in this connection someone has already asked: “How can you really have a conversation about God? After all, how can we really know God? Take Paul’s statement in Romans 3:11: ‘How unsearchable are His judgments. How inscrutable are His ways,’ the *Revised Standard Version* translates it. If that’s the case, who are we to question? God is sovereign, so why should we be sitting here having conversations about God?”

Graham: Ah, who are we to question the inscrutable ways of God? And that’s in Romans. But I notice in Romans 1, Paul says “You’re without excuse if you don’t know God.” So on the principle of taking the Bible as a whole, and not “here a little and there a little,” I would have to put Romans 1 alongside Romans 9 and the other places.

I think when he’s saying God’s thoughts are so far above ours, that is a reverent recognition that God is infinite. Think of all He knows! We’ll never fully understand God; we’re mere creatures. And at times we need to be reminded of His infinite superiority. But then it’s marvelous that the Infinite One would want to be known.

All through the Bible He says, “Israel is destroyed because they don’t know Me.” And “I’ve come to this earth that you may know Me.” So it’s pretty clear God wants to be known. But we shouldn’t pretend we’re gods who could know everything that He knows.

Lou: So we ought not to use that idea of God’s sovereignty, and so on, as an excuse to not think about Him.

Graham: Yes, and I think where that really comes from is Romans 9, where you have the verse: “Who are you to question God? Who are you to answer back to God?” And Romans 9, I believe, has been misunderstood by some very saintly people including a notable theologian in Reformation days. One needs to really put Romans 9 in the whole context of Romans — certainly in the context of chapters 1 through 9.

In Romans 1-8, Paul has been saying to his audience (which is made up of both Jews and Gentiles), “I have great good news for you. God will save all who trust Him—whether you are Jew or Gentile, bond or free, male or female. He’ll save everybody who trusts Him.” And as Paul was developing chapters 1-8, he could sense that certain members of His audience (descended from Abraham) were not taking this too kindly, because they thought that they had a **special relationship** with God. You know, God almost had made a deal with their ancestor. And that’s why they were so concerned with their genealogy and other matters.

And when Paul got to the end of chapter 8, he sensed that some in his audience were quite offended. So he turned to them and said, “I sense that some of you don’t like what I’ve said, that God is the kind of God that would save all who trust Him. I want to know (you people who object to this), are you suggesting you would run the universe better than God? Are you saying God cannot save all who trust Him? Let me tell you something: God is going to run this universe precisely as He wishes. Just as the potter takes a lump of clay and makes of the same clay a

vessel for honor, and a vessel for dishonor, so God has the right—if He will exercise it—to run His universe any way He likes!” {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, *Conversations About God*, #1 with Lou Venden, “The Conflict in God’s Family” January 1984, Loma Linda, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link:* <http://pkp.cc/1MMCAG>

Lou: A question has come up that takes us back to the perspective that we are studying—and that we’re looking at this whole thing from—the great controversy perspective: war in heaven. “Why doesn’t God take more firm control of the universe—even if that would mean a bit of a loss of freedom? It would seem that the price of freedom is almost too much? With all the pain and the tragedy that happens in our world, couldn’t God have done a better job of protecting us from the consequences of freedom?”

Graham: I remember years ago a lady came up after a meeting, and she said, “I’d be willing to give up some of my freedom to have peace and security once again; to be safe. I wish God had not given me quite so much freedom.” Like today, to be safe on the plane from terrorists we’re willing to stand in line and go through those electronic devices.

Lou: And feel rather good about it. I want them to check rather carefully.

Graham: See, so we would rather give up our freedom in order to be safe. But on a universe-wide scale, to say to God, “I know you’ve paid a great price for freedom, but I’d rather not be that free”?

And God says, “Well, I’m sorry. That’s one thing that is not negotiable. I will keep my universe free, or your trust and love will mean nothing. To do what you’re saying; yes, I could save everybody—for example, if I turn my universe into a penitentiary.” See, if He would lock us up in solitary confinement so we couldn’t hurt each other, He could save everybody. But God says, “I refuse to be a prison warden for the rest of eternity. Forgive me, I would rather die than give up freedom.” And He has already died to show what freedom means to Him. I cannot ever say “God, take some freedom back.” {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, *Conversations About God*, #4 with Lou Venden, “God’s Way of Restoring Trust” February 1984, Loma Linda, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link:* <http://pkp.cc/4MMCAG>

The most important of all Seventh-day Adventist beliefs is the one that brings joy and assurance to Christians everywhere, the truth about our heavenly Father that was confirmed at such cost by the life and the death of His Son.

We believe that God is not the kind of person His enemies have made Him out to be—arbitrary, unforgiving and severe. We accept the testimony of Jesus when He said, “If you have seen Me you have seen the Father.” God is just as loving and trustworthy as His Son, just as willing to forgive and heal. Though infinite in majesty and power, our Creator is an equally gracious Person who values nothing higher than the freedom, the dignity, and the individuality of His intelligent creatures—that their love, their faith, their willingness to listen and obey may be freely given.

This is the truth revealed through all the books of Scripture. This is the everlasting good news that wins the trust and admiration of God’s loyal children throughout the universe.

And like Abraham and Moses, the ones God spoke of as His trusted friends, we want to speak well and truly of our Heavenly Father. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from written material, “What We Believe”.} <https://pineknoll.org/>

Further Study with Ellen White

Opposition to the law of God had its beginning in the courts of heaven, with Lucifer, the covering cherub. Satan determined to be first in the councils of heaven, and equal with God. He began his work of rebellion with the angels under his command, seeking to diffuse among them the spirit of discontent. And he worked in so deceptive a way that many of the angels were won to his allegiance before his purposes were fully known. Even the loyal angels could not fully discern his character, nor see to what his work was leading. When Satan had succeeded in winning many angels to his side, he took his cause to God, representing that it was the desire of the angels that he occupy the position that Christ held. {7BC 972.6}

The evil continued to work until the spirit of disaffection ripened into active revolt. Then there was war in heaven, and Satan, with all who sympathized with him, was cast out. Satan had warred for the mastery in heaven, and had lost the battle. God could no longer trust him with honor and supremacy, and these, with the part he had taken in the government of heaven, were taken from him. {7BC 973.1}

So long as all created beings acknowledged the allegiance of love, there was perfect harmony throughout the universe of God. It was the joy of the heavenly host to fulfill the purpose of their Creator. They delighted in reflecting His glory and showing forth His praise. And while love to God was supreme, love for one another was confiding and unselfish. There was no note of discord to mar the celestial harmonies. But a change came over this happy state. There was one who perverted the freedom that God had granted to His creatures. Sin originated with him who, next to Christ, had been most honored of God and was highest in power and glory among the inhabitants of heaven. Lucifer, “son of the morning,” was first of the covering cherubs, holy

and undefiled. He stood in the presence of the great Creator, and the ceaseless beams of glory enshrouding the eternal God rested upon him. . . . {CTr 9.2}

Little by little Lucifer came to indulge the desire for self-exaltation. . . . Though all his glory was from God, this mighty angel came to regard it as pertaining to himself. Not content with his position, though honored above the heavenly host, he ventured to covet homage due alone to the Creator. Instead of seeking to make God supreme in the affections and allegiance of all created beings, it was his endeavor to secure their service and loyalty to himself. And coveting the glory with which the infinite Father had invested His Son, this prince of angels aspired to power that was the prerogative of Christ alone. . . {CTr 9.3}

To dispute the supremacy of the Son of God, thus impeaching the wisdom and love of the Creator, had become the purpose of this prince of angels. To this object he was about to bend the energies of that master mind, which, next to Christ's, was first among the hosts of God. But He who would have the will of all His creatures free left none unguarded to the bewildering sophistry by which rebellion would seek to justify itself. Before the great contest should open, all were to have a clear presentation of His will, whose wisdom and goodness were the spring of all their joy.—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 35-37. {CTr 9.4}

Nothing is more plainly taught in Scripture than that God was in no wise responsible for the entrance of sin; that there was no arbitrary withdrawal of divine grace, no deficiency in the divine government, that gave occasion for the uprising of rebellion. Sin is an intruder, for whose presence no reason can be given. It is mysterious, unaccountable; to excuse it, is to defend it. Could excuse for it be found, or cause shown for its existence, it would cease to be sin. {FLB 66.3}

The underworking [of Satan] was so subtle that it could not be made to appear before the heavenly host as the thing that it really was This condition of things had existed a long period of time before Satan was unmasked.—4BC 1143. {TA 40.1}

God in His great mercy bore long with Lucifer. He was not immediately degraded from his exalted station when he first indulged the spirit of discontent, not even when he began to present his false claims before the loyal angels. Long was he retained in heaven. Again and again he was offered pardon on condition of repentance and submission.—GC 495, 496. {TA 40.2}

In the scenes that transpired in the judgment hall and at Calvary, we see what the human heart is capable of when under the influence of Satan. Christ submitted to crucifixion, although the heavenly host could have delivered Him. The angels suffered with Christ. God Himself was crucified with Christ; for Christ was one with the Father. Those who reject Christ, those who will not have this man to rule over them, choose to place themselves under the rule of Satan, to do

his work as his bondslaves. Yet for them Christ yielded up His life on Calvary (BE Aug. 6, 1894). {5BC 1108.5}

The spotless Son of God took upon Himself the burden of sin. He who had been one with God, felt in His soul the awful separation that sin makes between God and man. This wrung from His lips the anguished cry, “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?” Matthew 27:46. It was the burden of sin, the sense of its terrible enormity, of its separation of the soul from God—it was this that broke the heart of the Son of God. {SC 13.1}

Christ yielded not in the least degree to the torturing foe, even in His bitterest anguish. Legions of evil angels were all about the Son of God, yet the holy angels were bidden not to break their ranks and engage in conflict with the taunting, reviling foe. Heavenly angels were not permitted to minister unto the anguished spirit of the Son of God. It was in this terrible hour of darkness, the face of His Father hidden, legions of evil angels enshrouding Him, the sins of the world upon Him, that the words were wrenched from His lips: “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” . . . {LHU 43.5}

So keenly did He feel the sinfulness of sin that for a moment the cup trembled in His hand, and all heaven heard the agonizing cry, “O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me” (Matthew 26:39). “Nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done” (Luke 22:42). The omnipotent God suffered with His Son. {UL 223.3}

Press close to Jesus, and place your hand in His, and He will firmly hold your hand, and never let go of the soul who maintains his faith in Him. . . . {UL 42.3}

Jesus presented the Father as one to whom we could give our confidence and present our wants. When we are in terror of God, and overwhelmed with the thought of His glory and majesty, the Father points us to Christ as His representative. What you see revealed in Jesus, of tenderness, compassion, and love, is the reflection of the attributes of the Father. The cross of Calvary reveals to man the love of God. Christ represents the Sovereign of the universe as a God of love. By the mouth of the prophet He said, “I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee” (Jeremiah 31:3). {HP 18.3}

The character of God as revealed by Christ invites our faith and love, for we have a Father whose mercy and compassion fail not. At every step of our journey heavenward He will be with us to guide in every perplexity, to give us help in every temptation. {HP 16.4}

From the opening of the great controversy it has been Satan’s purpose to misrepresent God’s character and to excite rebellion against His law, and this work appears to be crowned with success. The multitudes give ear to Satan’s deceptions and set themselves against God. But amid the working of evil, God’s purposes move steadily forward to their accomplishment; to all created intelligences He is making manifest His justice and benevolence. {PP 338.2}

So long as the people of God preserve their fidelity to Him, so long as they cling by living faith to Jesus, they are under the protection of heavenly angels, and Satan will not be permitted to exercise his hellish arts upon them to their destruction. {OHC 92.5}

It is the greatest joy of the angels of heaven to spread the shield of their tender love over souls who turn to God. {OHC 92.6}

Satanic agencies are ever warring for the mastery over human minds. But the angels of God are constantly at work, strengthening the weak hands and confirming the feeble knees of all who call upon God for help. The promise to every child of God is, “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you” (Matthew 7:7). The Lord is more willing to give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him than parents are to give good gifts to their children. {UL 68.3}

In the councils of heaven it was decided that principles must be acted upon that would not at once destroy Satan’s power, for it was His [God’s] purpose to place things upon an eternal basis of security. . . . God’s order must be contrasted with the new order after Satan’s devising. The corrupting principles of Satan’s rule must be revealed. The principles of righteousness expressed in God’s law must be demonstrated as unchangeable, eternal, perfect.—*Manuscript 57, 1896 (Manuscript Releases, vol. 18, pp. 360, 361).* {CTr 13.6}

Satan led men to conceive of God as a being whose chief attribute is stern justice—one who is a severe judge, a harsh, exacting creditor. He pictured the Creator as a being who is watching with jealous eye to discern the errors and mistakes of men that He may visit judgments upon them. It was to remove this dark shadow, by revealing to the world the infinite love of God, that Jesus came to live among men.—SC 11 (1892). {1MCP 250.1}

The knowledge which God did not want our first parents to have was a knowledge of guilt. And when they accepted the assertions of Satan, which were false, disobedience and transgression were introduced into our world. This disobedience to God’s express command, this belief of Satan’s lie, opened the floodgates of woe upon the world. Satan has continued the work begun in the Garden of Eden. He has worked vigilantly, that man might accept his assertions as proof against God. He has worked against Christ in His efforts to restore the image of God in man, and imprint in his soul the similitude of God. {1SM 214.2}

Satan was found in only one tree to endanger the safety of Adam and Eve. He planned to attract the holy pair to that one tree, that they might do the very thing God had said they should not do—eat of the tree of knowledge. . . . The subtlety of Satan will not decrease, but the wisdom given to men through a living connection with the Source of all light and divine knowledge will be proportionate to his arts and wiles. {5T 504.1}

God had power to hold Adam back from touching the forbidden fruit; but had He done this, Satan would have been sustained in his charge against God's arbitrary rule. Man would not have been a free moral agent, but a mere machine (RH June 4, 1901). {1BC 1084.2}

Christ does not drive but draws men unto Him. The only compulsion which He employs is the constraint of love. {MB 127.1}

I saw that the angels of God are never to control the will. God sets before man life and death. He can have his choice. {EW 221.1}

The work of redemption will be complete. In the place where sin abounded, God's grace much more abounds. The earth itself, the very field that Satan claims as his, is to be not only ransomed but exalted. Our little world, under the curse of sin the one dark blot in His glorious creation, will be honored above all other worlds in the universe of God. Here, where the Son of God tabernacled in humanity; where the King of glory lived and suffered and died,—here, when He shall make all things new, the tabernacle of God shall be with men, "and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God." And through endless ages as the redeemed walk in the light of the Lord, they will praise Him for His unspeakable Gift,— *Immanuel, "God with us."* {DA 26.3}

Our lifework here is a preparation for the life eternal. The education begun here will not be completed in this life; it will be going forward through all eternity—ever progressing, never completed. {Mar 363.3}

Every faculty will be developed, every capacity increased. The acquirement of knowledge will not weary the mind or exhaust the energies. There the grandest enterprises may be carried forward, the loftiest aspirations reached, the highest ambitions realized; and still there will arise new heights to surmount, new wonders to admire, new truths to comprehend, fresh objects to call forth the powers of mind and soul and body. {Mar 363.6}

The resurrection of Jesus was a sample of the final resurrection of all who sleep in Him. The risen body of the Saviour, His deportment, the accents of His speech, were all familiar to His followers. In like manner will those who sleep in Jesus rise again. We shall know our friends even as the disciples knew Jesus. Though they may have been deformed, diseased, or disfigured in this mortal life, yet in their resurrected and glorified body their individual identity will be perfectly preserved, and we shall recognize, in the face radiant with the light shining from the face of Jesus, the lineaments of those we love. {TMK 362.3}