BATTLING A DEFEATED ENEMY

On May 8, 1945, the German command officially surrendered to the Allied forces, which historians traditionally hold as the end of the Second World War in Europe. However, despite the surrender, some German troops continued to resist. One example is the Battle of Slivice, which occurred in Czechoslovakia from the eleventh to the twelfth of May in 1945. During this battle, Czech partisans and Soviet Red Army troops faced off against a remnant of the German Army. The Battle of Slivice, one of the last major battles on European ground in World War II, ended with the German forces’ defeat.

Looking at the greater cosmic conflict between Christ and Satan, the Bible is clear that Jesus has already won the war. However, similar to the Battle of Slivice, there are still daily battles being waged in every human being’s life. The victory over Satan was established at the cross, but the effects will not be fully realized until we see a “new heaven and a new earth,” after the first heaven and earth have “passed away” (Rev. 21:1). For now, suffering, pain, death, and evil abound in this world.

Though we know “an enemy has done this” (Matt. 13:28), having to deal with Satan’s attacks and the effects of sin, regardless of their shape or form, can be challenging. Why does God allow the pain? How are we to handle it, and in what way can understanding the metanarrative of the great controversy be helpful in dealing with this suffering? We will be exploring these questions and themes in this week’s lesson.
Write out Job 1, 2 from the translation of your choice. If you’re pressed for time, write out Job 1:18–22. You may also rewrite the passage in your own words, or outline or mind-map the chapter.
RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

Tragedy and suffering are universal realities for all humans. Not everyone experiences the same intensity of hurt and sorrow, but no one is immune to it. Many of life’s most painful challenges have to do with the debilitating effects of sin on human beings: a shortened lifespan, decay, sickness, disease, and overall degeneration of the mind and body. Other problems we face stem from the evil choices that people around us make; violence and abuse are committed all the time. Some pain is self-inflicted, the direct consequence of one’s own choices.

The book of Job opens yet a wider dimension regarding the causes of pain and suffering. It portrays a grand cosmic warfare between good and evil that plays out in our personal lives. In Job 1 we see that Satan, having asserted himself as ruler over the earth, presented himself as a delegate to a certain celestial meeting. In a conversation with God, he argued that Job, a faithful, wealthy businessman and philanthropist, was only loyal to God because God blessed him. In other words, Satan claimed that God was bribing His people into obedience; that they were loyal to Him only so long as life was good. God did not need to prove Himself; as the Omniscient One, He knows all things as they truly are, but for the sake of this council meeting, the representatives of other planets, and all future readers of this story, He allowed Job’s life to serve as a radical example of how God never forces nor manipulates anyone into serving Him.

After being granted access to Job’s wealth and family, Satan wreaked absolute havoc, destroying Job’s possessions and killing his servants and even his children. Through it all, Job’s trust in God remained steadfast. Satan then claimed that Job would indeed curse God if only God removed protection over Job’s own body. When God acquiesced, Satan tormented Job with disease and awful pain, amplified by the disapproval and harsh rejection of his wife and friends.

The text suggests that the great controversy, portrayed here as a public dispute between the two parties, is playing out in the context of a court scene and must therefore follow certain rules of engagement that are not always understood or known to the human(s) involved. The first two chapters of Job show a negotiation between Satan and God, which suggests that what the two sides can and cannot do may vary depending on the circumstances. The rules may change, depending at least in part on where the person’s loyalties lie. If the individuals are believers, God has certain rights to and claims over them; if not, Satan stakes his claims.

How does knowing this help us in our suffering? It may not help alleviate the pain, but understanding the larger picture can give purpose to the pain and tragedy that’s not self-induced. One of the most powerful parts of this story is that Job did not have the privilege of seeing behind the curtain, and yet “in all this Job did not sin nor charge God with wrong” (Job 1:22). Even when we only have a limited view of what is happening, we can choose to trust God with the things we do not understand.
HAVE YOU CONSIDERED MY SERVANT [YOUR NAME]?

It’s a blessing to be known, loved, and appreciated by those closest to you, but it’s another level entirely when the mighty Creator God of the universe, who’s fully aware of every being, every star, and every atom, not only acknowledges you but considers you worth bragging about! “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?” (Job 1:8).

Job trusted that God loved Him, even when he felt abandoned. It wasn’t until the end of the book of Job that God restored his losses and vindicated him before his friends. Job had certainly upheld a covenant relationship with God for many years and had a good understanding of His love and grace, but there’s no indication that Job ever learned the story behind the inordinate amount of suffering he went through. If anything, Job felt that God was treating him like an “enemy” (Job 13:24), the same as the wicked (9:20–22). In a very real sense, Job struggled with feeling that perhaps God was ignoring him and had perhaps even wronged him (19:6, 7). He didn’t understand why he had to endure such intense pain. Though he pondered various hypothetical scenarios in his quest to find meaning, nothing made real sense in the end. The only truth that really mattered was that God cared deeply about Job. He prevailed because he continued to trust that truth.

When we go through seasons of suffering and fail to find an explanation for what’s happening, we may come up with our own theories about God and how He feels about us. It is, of course, best to stick with what the Bible says about God and not go forward with mere assumptions. What Job didn’t realize amid the pain, and what we often forget as well, is that there’s a story unfolding that reaches far beyond just ours. It’s also important to note that God is not threatened by our questions or feelings of pain as expressed by Job. God invites us to pour out our hearts to Him, including moments of sorrow and questioning.

When a computer enlarges a picture so much that only four square pixels are visible on the screen, it’s very difficult to guess what the rest of the picture shows. Four pixels is far too little information to piece together the picture in its entirety. In our lives, we often only see four pixels at a time. In those moments, we have to trust that God sees the bigger picture and knows what’s best. While we may not understand the why of our pain and loss in the moment, we cannot give in to the temptation to change what we know to be true about God. You may not always feel it, but God does care deeply about you. He will bring the pain to an end, just as He did with Job. “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” (Rev. 21:4).
What relationship do the following verses have with Job 1, 2?

Ephesians 6:12
Job 42
1 Peter 5:8
Luke 22:31, 32
2 Corinthians 12:7–10
1 Corinthians 10:13
2 Timothy 3:12
Romans 8:28

What other verses/promises come to mind in connection with the primary passage?

Review your memorized verse from Job 1, 2
THOUGH HE SLAY ME, I WILL TRUST HIM

If we had to endure Job’s lot, many of us would likely heed his wife’s counsel to “curse God and die!” (Job 2:9). Enduring trials of such magnitude is not easy, to say the least. Yes, we can find solace in knowing that this is all temporary, that the great controversy is real, and that all things will eventually get better, but this does not alleviate the pain when we’re in the middle of it.

After Satan’s first wave of attacks, Job said, “The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord” (Job 1:21). After the second wave, his response was, “Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?” (Job 2:10). In other words: “I trust God. He knows what He’s doing, and He has the right to do this.”

Throughout the discussion with his friends, we see Job trying to make sense of everything he was experiencing. He even questioned God at times, but his trust in God remained strong, knowing that Jesus was His Savior: “For I know that my Redeemer lives” (Job 19:25).

One of Job’s most powerful statements of faith is found in Job 13:15: “Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him.” The faith expressed here may be foolish from a human perspective, but the implications are powerful. This deep level of trust reflects Jesus’ faith and strikes a major blow against Satan’s claims. On the cross, Christ felt like the Father had abandoned Him as He carried the sins of the world. He could not see the hope of the resurrection, but He remained hanging, trusting in the Father’s faithfulness, which, again, He could neither see nor feel.

Even though it seemed like God was raining curses down on him, Job knew from his years of walking with the Lord that He is good and trustworthy in every moment, even those in which it doesn’t feel that way. Furthermore, when God provided no answer to Job’s questioning other than to point out that there are things too big for humans to understand, Job’s relentless trust in God was again displayed when he finally said, “I... repent in dust and ashes” (Job 42:6) and submitted to the Lord on the basis of trust, not reason.

The key to endurance in times of pain is to get to know Jesus in times of wellbeing. Yes, the valley of the shadow of death may temporarily block our ability to feel His presence, but we can be sure that He will always be with us. With Job we can say, “When He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold” (Job 23:10).
HEAVEN IS NEAR TO THOSE WHO SUFFER

“Satan’s enmity against the human race is kindled because, through Christ, they are the objects of God’s love and mercy. He desires to thwart the divine plan for man’s redemption, to cast dishonor upon God, by defacing and defiling His handiwork; he would cause grief in heaven and fill the earth with woe and desolation. And he points to all this evil as the result of God’s work in creating man.” (Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* [1911], 506.)

“The same enmity is manifested toward Christ’s followers as was manifested toward their Master. Whoever sees the repulsive character of sin, and in strength from above resists temptation, will assuredly arouse the wrath of Satan and his subjects. Hatred of the pure principles of truth, and reproach and persecution of its advocates, will exist as long as sin and sinners remain. The followers of Christ and the servants of Satan cannot harmonize. The offense of the cross has not ceased. ‘All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.’ 2 Timothy 3:12.” (Ibid., 507.)

“Heaven is very near those who suffer for righteousness’ sake. Christ identifies His interests with the interests of His faithful people; He suffers in the person of His saints; and whoever touches His chosen ones touches Him. The power that is near to deliver from physical harm or distress is also near to save from the greater evil, making it possible for the servant of God to maintain his integrity under all circumstances, and to triumph through divine grace.” (Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings* [1890], 545.)

“While the Lord has not promised His people exemption from trials, He has promised that which is far better. He has said, ‘As thy days, so shall thy strength be’ (Deuteronomy 33:25). ‘My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness’ (2 Corinthians 12:9). If you are called to go through the fiery furnace for His sake, Jesus will be by your side even as He was with the faithful three in Babylon. Those who love their Redeemer will rejoice at every opportunity of sharing with Him humiliation and reproach. The love they bear their Lord makes suffering for His sake sweet.” (Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing* [1896], 30.)

“In the future life the mysteries that here have annoyed and disappointed us will be made plain. We shall see that our seemingly unanswered prayers and disappointed hopes have been among our greatest blessings.” (Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* [1905], 474.)

“Of all the gifts that heaven can bestow upon men, fellowship with Christ in His sufferings is the most weighty trust and the highest honor. Not Enoch, who was translated to heaven, not Elijah, who ascended in a chariot of fire, was greater or more honored than John the Baptist, who perished alone in the dungeon. ‘Unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for His sake.’ Philippians 1:29.” (Ibid., 478.)
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Share insights from this week’s memory verse and Bible study as well as any discoveries, observations, and questions with your Sabbath School class (or Bible study group). Consider these discussion questions with the rest of the group.

How can you discern if a trial is from God or Satan?

Why do you think God allowed Job to serve as an example to prove His point to Satan?

How can reflecting on the stories of those who have endured trials help us grow in our faith and better face our own challenges?

Why are Christ’s followers subject to persecution and suffering?

What’s the best way to deal with God’s apparent silence and absence in difficult times?

How can we learn to trust God better even in moments of pain and suffering?

Do you think enduring trials can sometimes be a positive thing in the long run? Why or why not?

What are some lessons you’ve learned in times of suffering that you’ve later been grateful for?