

“Reading the Bible Together”

Issue 15.
Book of Job.
April 2010.

Introduction:

We’re slowly bringing this period of writing, known as the Second Temple period to a close. But not without reading one of the Books that has perhaps had more bearing than virtually any other, especially on our human emotional state, Job.

This month:

What is Job all about?

The Book of Job:

Like the Book of Esther the Book is thought to date from roughly the same period (500-400BC). But unknown Jewish author is speaking of a character (Job) who probably lived roughly at the time of the Patriarchs, Isaac and Jacob in particular (1800-1600BC), the reason being that Job measures his wealth in cattle and sheep, common for this earlier period.

So here is a Book about an old sage like character Job. Why has his story been so widely remembered and valued?

The reason may well be because the work focuses on one of the oldest theological and philosophical problems of our human experience, suffering (otherwise called theodicy – if there is a God who loves us, why do bad things happen).

What Job offers us is a fascinating working out of a uniquely Jewish response and answer.

What pervaded in Greek thought at the time the author wrote Job was this: if human beings suffered the reason had to be attributable to one of three answers a) God was not almighty, b) God is not always just or “fair” in His judgment, or c) man may be innocent and one’s fate simply lies into the lap of the gods.

The official Jewish response to this Greek outworking of the question of suffering was quite different. In Israel it was unthinkable that God was not almighty, nor that He was not always just, therefore it had to be human beings who were at fault. They had lost their innocence a long time ago so illness and suffering were linked to fallenness or sin.

This is not an uncommon view still held today by many who search for some sort of explanation as to the events and suffering that they are going through: why has such and such happened? Well, it must be that I have done something ‘wrong,’ almost to deserve it. This was called the “self-evident” argument and at least gave people an answer.

But, as we see here in the Book of Job, what might work in theory still retains a sense of unfairness or lack of compassion when worked out in reality. Job is deliberately depicted, as much as any human being could be, as a righteous and “innocent” man. Enter God’s adversary, “Satan,” traditionally believed to be a fallen Archangel who wants himself to be god. He seeks to exploit the situation (Ch 1) by proving to Job that God either doesn’t care what happens to him or that in fact God doesn’t perhaps exist. To God, Satan seeks to show that Job’s righteousness, which God cherishes more than anything, is nothing but Job’s own self-interest. So God allows Satan to have his way, to test Job, because God continues to love and believe in Job, as He does in all humanity.

When calamity after calamity reigns down upon him Job’s friends appeal to various versions of the “self-evident” argument (Chs 3-37) to answer Job’s cry of “why is this happening to me?” None satisfies. God seems far away, Job is in despair and wishes he hadn’t been born and eventually even Job is reduced to silence.

Then, into the silence God Himself speaks (chs 38-42) in what is one of the longest and most beautiful speeches recorded anywhere in Scripture as to the mind and heart of God. God doesn't actually address Job's concerns or suffering He simply reminds his friend of who God is; that He has loved Job since the beginning of time and has valued and cherished every act of Job's righteousness and faithfulness more than anything. Job's final speech is one of awe and renewed faithfulness, You are God, which of course means Satan, or I am not. And Job's fortunes are restored.

In many ways Job is both an inspiration and also a strange book for our age. In that sense it does not answer the problem of suffering except to accept that it is a problem even today. What it offers is the incredible reality that God does not only care but passionately loves His creation and longs for us to remain faithful even when all else seems to point in the opposite direction. It seems to me that it was out of a love like this that God's decision to send His Son into the world to do for Job and for us that which we cannot do for ourselves, was born; to take all the pain and suffering, as well as all the sin to Himself and there to deal with it so that we may never lose sight that we are always eternally and unconditionally loved.

Does that mean that "bad" things don't happen? No. But it does mean that when they do, God is right there with us, in the thick of it trying to hold on to us and to maintain that love which ultimately is all that we can ever hope for or dream of.

Bible Together Meetings: April meetings will be:

Wednesday 7th Apr 9.00am – 10.00am – in the Chancel. This month when we meet I and a few others will be in Iona. Please meet though and have a discussion amongst yourselves about what you have read and what is coming up in this next month as we look at the Book of Job.

Wednesday 21st April 8.00pm – 9.00pm – in the Chancel as usual.

Scheme of Reading for January:

<u>Date:</u>	<u>Reference:</u>	<u>Date:</u>	<u>Reference:</u>
Thurs 1 st Apr	Esther 5:1 – 6:14	Mon 19 th Apr	Job 19:1 – 19:29
Fri 2 nd Apr	Esther 7:1 – 8:17	Tues 20 th Apr	Job 20:1 – 20:29
(Good Friday)		Wed 21st Apr	Job 21:1 – 21:34
Sat 3 rd Apr	Esther 9:1 – 10:3	(Bible Together Meeting today @8.00pm)	
Sun 4th Apr	-----	Thurs 22 nd Apr	Job 22:1 – 22:30
(Easter Day)		Fri 23 rd Apr	Job 23:1 – 24:25
Mon 5 th Apr	Job 1:1 – 1:22	Sat 24 th Apr	Job 25:1 – 28:28
Tues 6 th Apr	Job 2:1 – 2:13	Sun 25 th Apr	-----
Wed 7th Apr	Job 3:1 – 3:26	Mon 26 th Apr	Job 29:1 – 31:40
(Bible Together Meeting – even though I'm away)		Tues 27 th Apr	Job 32:1 – 33:33
Thurs 8 th Apr	Job 4:1 – 5:27	Wed 28 th Apr	Job 34:1 – 34:37
Fri 9 th Apr	Job 6:1 – 7:21	Thurs 29 th Apr	Job 35:1 – 37:24
Sat 10 th Apr	Job 8:1 – 8:22	Fri 30 th Apr	Job 38:1 – 39:30
Sun 11 th Apr	-----	Sat 1 st May	Job 40: 1 – 41:34
Mon 12 th Apr	Job 9:1 – 10:22	Sun 2 nd May	-----
Tues 13 th Apr	Job 11:1 – 11:20	Mon 3rd May	Job 42:1 – 42:17
Wed 14 th Apr	Job 12:1 – 14:22	(Bank Holiday)	
Thurs 15 th Apr	Job 15:1 – 15:35	Tues 4 th May	Psalms 1
Fri 16 th Apr	Job 16:1 – 17:16	Wed 5th May	Psalms 2
Sat 17 th Apr	Job 18:1 – 18:21	(Bible Together Meeting today @9.00am)	
Sun 18 th Apr	-----	Thurs 6 th May	Psalms 3, 4, 5