

# Under The Fig Tree



## WEEK 23

### Day 1

Job Chapters 15 to 18. Who is Job? We do not know and will not be able to work it out. Who wrote the Book? It is left a mystery on purpose. Whoever wrote the Book was inspired to write it. If it was parable it was based on real experience. It was either the experience of someone whom the author had heard about or known, or it was based on personal experience. The detail of the dialogue indicates it is unlikely to be a record of actual conversations. Also the people speak in literary terms rather than everyday conversation. To a large extent this is literature based on the experiences and observations of life on this earth. As I have said, I think that it could have been written by Solomon who dedicated his life to the pursuit of understanding and wisdom. He wrote books on contrasting subjects from all of life's experiences. Whether he wrote it or not, it does not matter. What matters is that the inspired author presents us the paradox of a person who suffers, not because of his sin, but because God chose him as a righteous man to stand in faith despite all.

Who then is Job? He represents those who seek to be righteous and who suffer in the spiritual battles of this world. When Adam and Eve left the protection of the Garden of Eden a phase of human history began that involves toil and hardship. Out of the fallen world God decreed that He would call to Himself a righteous people. He made covenant with the Patriarchs and confirmed it by an Oath. He identifies those who desire to be righteous. Through their life the righteous grow in faith through varied circumstances. The suffering of this world is a means of testing and refining faith. It is not that God delights in our suffering, but that suffering is inevitable in a fallen world. God knows how to turn suffering to faith and use it for His Kingdom purposes. After the Fall, satan had scope to war against us. No scheme of his will succeed, for those who desire to grow in closer and closer fellowship with God. God has allowed the spiritual battle for a season of this earth's existence. Satan was the cause of Job's suffering. All who read this Book and have a desire to be righteous will find empathy with Job and encouragement to continue. This is a personal application of the story.

There is also a bigger picture to which the story applies. It is a parable of all history, where satan wars against all God's people. In the midst of this war Yeshua came to earth as a man and the battle centred on Him. Job was fully human. Yeshua took on humanity whilst being fully God on earth. Yeshua, the Man, suffered on the Cross to the ultimate degree, and victory over satan was proclaimed forever. The Book of Job points to this, as well as to the day to day experiences of God's people in a fallen world.

Satan has brought suffering on many people over the years. In particular consider the Children of Israel. The Books of Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther refer to Judah's exile in Babylon. We will read them later. Among those who were exiled to Babylon were some people who desired to be righteous. The nation, as a whole, went into exile because of sin. There were many ordinary people who were carried along by the tide of events in Judah under one King after another. Some sought to be righteous despite the sins of the nation as a whole. Daniel and Jeremiah are examples. They were among those who were righteous in God's eyes, but suffered exile nevertheless. God, according to His Covenant through Moses, allowed the enemy to conquer their nation. The Book of Job would have been a comfort to those who tried to understand the exile and remain faithful to God, who eventually brought them back to their land. There has been a second exile of the Jews, since 70 AD when Jerusalem fell to the Romans. It lasted nearly 2000 years and has involved immense suffering. Many of those who have been exiled have sought to be righteous before God. Nevertheless, they have suffered at the hands of the nations to which they have been exiled. The persecution of the Jews has been a disgrace on the history of the world. What has happened to these people is too terrible to study in detail, descending to its depth in the holocaust of the Second World War. The Book of Job is as relevant to this suffering as it was to the life of the one man who is depicted in the story.

Job is not a short book that can be read quickly. It is a long book with extensive discourses. This means that we must take time to read it so that we might meditate upon the subject over several days. We read about Satan's challenge to God and the permission that God gave him to test Job. This is written into the story for us, but Job did not know this. We are observers who know more about what is going on than Job did himself. He only knows that he is suffering immensely and does not know why. It is a drama taking place before our eyes and we consider the dialogue between Job and his friends with more insight than they have. If we did not have that insight and were, instead, in Job's place or the place of one of his friends, we would see the situation from a different perspective. We would be as perplexed as they were. We would hope to be like Job, who knew that he had sought to be righteous before God, and also knew that this was not punishment for sin. We would hope not to be like his friends who knew something of the ways of God but had no clear understanding of this particular situation. Job and his friends are like any group of people in the suffering world who are trying to understand what is happening. Their conversation is typical of all who try to unravel mysteries too big for them concerning wars, famines, diseases, oppression and natural disasters. It is a picture of righteous people in the presence of the philosophers and religious scholars of the world.

Job considers himself a failure despite all his attempts to be righteous. God is silent for the present but knows full well what is happening. Satan is hoping to turn Job against God. Job's friends try to reason out the situation. This is the suffering world all around us up to today and beyond, to the coming days of the antichrist. Read Chapters 15 to 18 and reflect prayerfully on what you read.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Day 2

Chapters 19 to 22. Read these four chapters today. Job's sought God daily throughout his life and this prepared him for this time of testing. He was a much better witness to the purposes of God than his friends. They have theory, but Job has a greater understanding of God than they have. In Chapter 19, Verses 25-29, he breaks forth with a revelation that is tantamount to Messianic faith – a Gospel message from the midst of a sinful, needy and suffering world where satan is rampant: *I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth; and after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God!* Job had victory in faith. His life on this earth may have been at an end but eternal life was the greater promise and goal. Such is the cry of all those who seek to be righteous and persevere through trials on this fallen earth. These are the heroes of faith of Hebrews 11. Job is a message for our times and for the times of trial coming upon this earth.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Day 3

Chapters 23 to 27. God was still silent. In the silence Job still trusted Him and his questions were directly to God, in the presence of friends who do not understand or give wise counsel. Job stood alone and honoured God despite all. We have glimpses of the Gospel right through Job if we have eyes to see. For example, when Yeshua set His face firmly to go to Jerusalem to suffer the Cross, His disciples tried to resist Him and gave unwise counsel, not knowing the ways of God sufficiently. *Get behind me satan*, said Yeshua to Peter (Matthew 16:23). Yeshua was alone as no other person has been when He suffered for us on the Cross.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Day 4

Ecclesiastes Chapter 1. It is useful to read this Chapter again at this point. It is the introduction to Solomon's summary of his quest for wisdom – a lifelong pursuit. In Verses 12 and 13 he says: *I the Preacher was king over Israel in Jerusalem. And I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven: this sore travail hath God given to the sons of man to be exercised therewith.* Read the entire Chapter in the context of our readings from Job.

\*\*\*\*\*

Job Chapter 28. Now return to the Book of Job. If this Chapter was not written by Solomon, it is written by someone who sought wisdom just as he did. It is a chapter very much like Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. The writer concludes that wisdom is not to be found like a philosophical principle. True wisdom comes from God as a gift. Wisdom is spiritual and cannot be fully understood in human terms. Job came to this conclusion in response to his questions stimulated through his suffering. His conclusion is exactly paralleled in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes (Verse 28): *And unto man he said, Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.*

\*\*\*\*\*

Chapters 29 to 31. This is the end of Job's discourse. He speaks from a valley experience of life where the dark shadows of death seem to be over him. Perhaps at the end he could write a Psalm like David did when he wrote Psalm 23: *yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me.* For the time being he is in the shadows. He reviews his life and longs for the good days that he once knew, but now they seem gone, and death lies before him. He has sought to be righteous and to live a good life, helping the poor and honouring God.

Every one of God's people must grow in faith and our faith must be tested. The extremes of our valley experiences are in God's hands. We sometimes suffer through sin. It is not the purpose of the Book of Job to discuss this aspect of suffering. Job is not about repentance for sin. That is reserved for other parts of the Bible. Job is about times of perplexity that come to the righteous. In such times we, like Job, can look back to the easier times – times of God's blessings – and long for them. The life of faith is not only on the mountaintops, it is also in the valleys. These Chapters from Job are for the valley times where we find ourselves just as he is, looking back in order to look forward, continuing in faith.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Day 5

Chapters 32 to 37. At this point a young man named Elihu came forward. It is a wonderful picture that transcends time. It represents our circumstances today. Job is the focus of attention of a group of people. They gather round in a huddle to discuss the circumstances of life. It is a picture of Greeks in the Academy of Plato, of Jews around a Rabbi or any group in a corner of any town in the world, including Christians around a friend in need. Job's sufferings are the centre of the discussions, which raise questions as to where God is and how He is to be understood. God is silent and so the dialogue reveals the extent of their understanding. Job is among the older men. He has a testimony of life, from which we can all learn if we seek to be righteous before God. His friends of a similar age-group lack his experience, however, and are more philosophical than bearers of wisdom from God.

Elihu, the young man, honours the elderly but has a freshness in his approach. All of them, including Elihu, lack full understanding. Nevertheless, like young people in our own communities, they see through to the errors of some of the discussions that they hear. Sometimes young people bring a fresh insight, even though they themselves are only just setting out on the path of faith. Elihu rebuked Job for looking inwardly and admonished him to look to God and not at his circumstances. He drifted, however, into the errors of the older men in his opinions about the way sin contributed to the suffering. He was used to prepare the way for God to speak to them all. This is what happens next in the dramatic account.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Day 6

Chapters 38 to 41. These are wonderful chapters, full of understanding. God has allowed Job to suffer in order to raise questions that cannot be answered through human logic. He allowed an extended dialogue to take place so that each of the men would discover their limits. God created the universe before any of us was born. We were born within the bounds of the universe's limitations, both of experience and understanding. Not one of us was there at Creation and not one of us was consulted about any aspect of the universe or the life that God gave to the creatures of the earth. It is useful to read Psalm 19 and Romans 1 today as well as these Chapters from Job. God confirms to us, through what He said to Job, that knowing Him as Creator helps us to understand our relationship with Him in all things. Job raises the subject of living in a world of suffering. God has given us certain bounds for understanding our life on this earth and how to live righteously. They are founded on Torah. But there is no bound to God's understanding. Beyond what we can understand lies faith in Him. Let God speak to you just as He spoke to Job and through the author of this Book.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Day 7

### A Day for Rest and Further Reflection

Job Chapter 42. Use this short Chapter as a stimulus to reflect on what God has taught you through your reading of Job. None of us can achieve perfection from our own efforts, so neither Job nor his friends were perfect in their lives or understanding. Job, through faith, was accounted more righteous than his friends and so God restored them all through Job's prayers. We, like Job, must learn to grow in faith through the circumstances of life. Let us desire to be righteous like Job, and trust God for our growth in faith and for those things that we cannot understand.

\*\*\*\*\*