

Job 28: Pain Management

The Bible interrupts its ancient history programme to bring us a selection of 'wisdom literature', reflections on life, prayers, songs and popular sayings, some from the lips or pens of people who've featured in the previous books. Kings David and Solomon are prominent.

But the first of these wisdom books is unique and mysterious. Some scholars think *Job* may be the oldest book in the Bible. It has no references to Israel, the kingdom, Jerusalem or the Temple. But it speaks about a timeless, universal topic, the problem of suffering.

If there is a God Who judges our actions, is He fair? Why do seemingly good people, like Job, suffer hideously, while certain scoundrels appear to literally get away with murder?

No simple answer is given. Perhaps the fact that Job and his associates debate it for nearly forty chapters is intended to illustrate just how difficult an issue this is to resolve from our perspective. Perhaps while their discussion may seem fruitless in one sense, in another it underlines the importance of talking, expressing our anguish, and equally the role of friends and counsellors in giving dignity to it with earnest, respectful listening.

So what can we glean from this book? What *can* we say?

It's a fact, in this present world God sometimes allows us to be tested. The devil is a malignant enemy always glad to take up any opportunity.

But it's equally important to note that God limits our suffering and rewards loyalty. Job complains understandably but never stops trusting and in time is granted an intense, humbling but vindicating experience of God's affirming presence. His latter years are filled with multiple blessings, bearing witness to the wisdom of his faith in 28v28:

'The fear of the Lord – that is wisdom, and to shun evil is understanding.'

And this amazing reference from antiquity to future resurrection:

'I know that my Redeemer lives and that in the end he will stand upon the earth.

And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God.' (19v25)

Those seeking an end to suffering should look to the One Who suffered the cross of Calvary but is risen triumphant as a wonderful promise of the life that is to come for people who keep the faith, like Job!