

The Daily Reader

Reading through the Bible together in October

BOOK Introductions

Job offers a hard look at suffering from both the human and divine perspective. In the first two chapters we catch a glimpse of the spiritual background as Satan and God discuss righteous Job (and then Satan is allowed to bring disasters into Job's life). From chapter 3 on we see Job responding, without the perspective of chapters 1-2. Much of the book is a cycle of debate between Job and three men, plus a fourth nearer the end. The "friends" are clear that suffering is a consequence for sin, so Job must be a terrible sinner. Job calls on God to disclose his righteousness. Where does wisdom come from in the harsh realities of life? It cannot come from human thought, it must come from God. Finally God speaks and Job is humbled by dozens of questions from the Almighty One. God is God. Job is dumbfounded. Finally God restores Job's fortunes again. There is no easy answer for undeserved suffering, but Job urges us to look heavenwards in every circumstance.

Proverbs is often considered the classic expression of Hebrew wisdom poetry. The initial chapters lay out a contrast between lady wisdom and lady folly, as a father disciplines his son for the challenges of life. From chapter 10 onwards the book moves into the familiar 2-4 line statements that contrast wise and foolish living. The book is written in the context of Jewish life under the Old Covenant. While our circumstances are different, the wisdom offered in Proverbs will serve us well if we grasp the basic issue of the book – the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding (1:7). Wisdom is not developed by accident, it takes diligence on our part to choose wisely in each circumstance of life. Choose lady

wisdom, not lady folly. The book appropriately ends with a beautiful description of the wife of noble character.

1 Timothy is a letter from Paul to his younger colleague. Paul had left Timothy in Ephesus and so wrote this letter to encourage him in his leadership within the church. Actually, the letter not only encouraged Timothy, but also served to reinforce his authority as a representative of the apostle. How should the local church function? How should men and women behave in light of the amazing mercy of the gospel? What are the qualifications for elders and deacons? How should the church care for the vulnerable? This letter is brimming with relevant material for the church in every generation, including ours.

2 Timothy is Paul's final letter – a very personal and touching letter to the younger man he has mentored over many years. Paul is imprisoned again and is aware that his time is running out. He is passionately concerned that the baton of the gospel be effectively passed to the next generation of leadership. Paul is deeply concerned about the challenges facing the church from without and from within. He urges Timothy to moral and spiritual purity. He urges Timothy to remember what he's learned from Paul in their ministry together. He urges Timothy to hold fast to the Scripture – God's provision for maintaining the health of the Church.

Titus is similar to 1 Timothy – a letter written to a representative left behind as Paul pressed on during his final days of freedom. This time it was Titus, left on Crete to establish the spiritual leadership of the local church there. For the church to survive.

Book introductions continued on reverse >

and thrive in a difficult culture, it needed spiritually qualified men to lead and protect it. Paul also urges Titus to involve all the believers in the ministry of the church, so that their good doctrine would be dressed up in the good deeds of Christian ministry.

Philemon lived in Colossae and was a believer in the church there. One of his slaves, Onesimus, had robbed his master and escaped, traveling to Rome. Somehow he came into contact with Paul and became a believer in Christ! Onesimus had become useful to Paul, but they knew he had to return to his master Philemon. So Paul sent Onesimus back to Philemon along with this tactful and affectionate letter. Roman law stated that a runaway slave could be punished or killed very violently – only the power of the Gospel transformed this situation so that Onesimus could return to His master as a useful brother in Christ! The final “block” of New Testament books we will read this year are all from the pen of John, the “disciple Jesus loved.” First we’ll enjoy John’s gospel:

John was the last gospel to be written and has a very different feel than the three “synoptic gospels” (“one-view”). His goal is clearly stated in 20:31 – John was written so that the reader will believe that Jesus is the divine Messiah and thereby have everlasting life. The first half of the book is built around a series of seven “signs.” These begin with turning water into wine, and conclude with the compelling miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead. Throughout the book Jesus’ claim to be God is found in his “I am” statements. There is repeated emphasis on faith and its counterpart – unbelief. The crowds want Him to be their king, but the leaders definitely do not “believe” in Him. Those who will believe in Him receive eternal life, life to the full! So the story moves toward Calvary, Jesus heading to his death with the calm dignity of a King in control of his circumstances. In the suffering and death of Jesus, we actually see His glory revealed! Is it possible to know God, to have sins forgiven, to become part of God’s family? John’s answer is a resounding yes!

Where we’ll be in October:

Psalms 113-150, Job, Proverbs 1-9, 1Timothy, 2Timothy, Titus, Philemon, John 1-8

For a reading plan see Andy Jack or the church website www.oakballchurch.org.uk