



THE BEREIA PAGE

“Examining . . . to see if these things are so” ~ Acts 17.11

On Reading Scripture

“Biblical illiteracy is a problem not only in society at large but also in the church. Most Christians have never read the Old Testament in its entirety. Surveys indicate that few can name the Ten Commandments or the Beatitudes. Such lack of Bible knowledge produces believers who may be ignorant of God’s will, dependent on feelings, and vulnerable to false teaching. Revelation’s first audience was promised a blessing for reading and obeying its prophetic word. A similar blessing is likewise available for today’s readers of the Bible. A renewed emphasis on Scripture reading, both public and private, has the potential to produce in our generation believers who are not only biblically literate but spiritually mature.” ~ Mark W. Wilson, “Revelation,” *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary*, ed. Clinton E. Arnold (Zondervan, 2002), 4:251

“Scripture may be written, but it is written to be read and heard aloud. It has an indispensable oral dimension. Some would even give higher priority to how Scripture is experienced orally than to Scripture in its written form.” ~ Carl R. Holladay, *A Critical Introduction to the New Testament: Interpreting the Message and Meaning of Jesus Christ* (Abingdon Press, 2005), 572

WHAT IF “WHAT WE ALL KNOW” ISN’T SO?

David Anguish

A previous [article](#) referenced Philip Yancey’s account of the devastation caused by the earthquake and tsunami that struck Japan in March 2011. I included in my summary the urgent question asked by a woman who, upon being rescued after two days buried in a pile of garbage and rubble, discovered she had lost everything—her family, friends, and town. Meeting Yancey after an hour-plus drive on temporary roads to hear him speak, she grabbed his hand and said, “Please don’t forget us! They forgot me for days, now they forget my town. I want to know why!”¹

Job is the person in Scripture who most famously wondered why. Adding to his physical suffering was the ordeal of having to respond to repeated charges—and lectures—from friends whom he called “miserable comforters” (Job 16.2). Eliphaz, for example, insisted Job’s afflictions belied his impeccable reputation. Something was amiss and his suffering was God’s way to lead him to repent (4.2-7, 17; 5.17-20, 27). Zophar raised the stakes, asking how Job could dare declare his innocence in the face of obvious evidence (his suffering!) that God was exacting what his guilt deserved; he should confess, repent, and find relief (11.2-6, 13-16, 20).²

In what at times was a testy exchange, Job defended his integrity and stated his desire for time in a heavenly courtroom with God himself (cf. 9.32-35). He rejected the assessments of his friends who not only were not listening to him, but, in presuming to fully know the ways of God, offered no comfort (13.4-12). Exasperated, he dismissed them: “No doubt you are the people, and wisdom will die with you” (12.2).

It’s not that Job didn’t understand his friends’ point and frustration: his case didn’t fit what he had been taught either. His suffering had made him “a laughing stock”—literally

Balanced

"In recent church history the doctrinal concern has been at the heart of the best conservative Christianities; the ethical concern, of the best liberal Christianities. The trick—the gift to be prayed for—is devotion to both doctrine and ethics, to Jesus and his justice, without rejecting either." ~ F. D. Bruner, *The Churchbook* (Word, 1990), 599; in Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, The New American Commentary (Broadman Press, 1992), 262

On Worship

"What happens when a community of faith forgets its own story? . . . No community of faith can long exist without its own story, invoking a beginning, a middle, and a purpose toward which it strives. If it forgets, that community may exchange its authentic story for a counterfeit one. This counterfeit story may be one of American culture or supremacy. It may be one where personal blessing supersedes God's action and lordship. It may be one of anemic remembrance, where pop culture, with its memory of 20 to 30 years, replaces the authentic Judeo-Christian memory of God's mighty acts of deliverance" ~ Mark Shipp, "'Congregational Song Is In Trouble'—What Makes a Good Hymn?" *Christian Studies* 19 (2003): 22-23

Cultural Blinders?

"After an extensive tour of the United States, Helmut Thielicke was asked what he saw as the greatest defect among American Christians. He replied, 'They have an inadequate view of suffering.' I have come to agree with him." ~ Philip Yancey, *Where Is God When It Hurts?* (Zondervan Publishing House, 1977), 15

adding insult to injury—because the premise of the retribution view of suffering was widely accepted as part of the common understanding of God's ultimate wisdom, power, and knowledge (12.3-25). Job had also accepted that premise, but his experience did not align with the orthodox conclusion (13.1-2). So, he again asked to present his case directly to God to learn what he had done (13.13, 23). He asked in faith, hoping to have his questions resolved (13.24), even if it cost him his life ("Even if he kills me, I will hope in him"—13.15a CSB).

Among other lessons from Job's story, we learn, first, that we should be very careful about declaring what we know God is doing: sometimes, occasions of suffering result directly from sin, but sometimes they don't. Absent a revealed word about the matter (or any other), we should not presume to make definitive proclamations. Second, we should be restrained in what we say when trying to comfort others who are hurting. Third, it's permissible to be honest with God about our feelings, frustrations, questions, anger, etc.³

The third lesson points to the real issue in Job, stated in the prologue, but often overlooked. Job's test was initiated—and endorsed—by the LORD (Yahweh) (1.8). It was not a test designed to punish him, but aimed to reveal the true nature of his faith: was he serving just for the benefit that came from the protective hedge or because of genuine trust in God (1.9-10)? Satan claimed it was the former; God said it was the latter.

Job's response proved that God's claim was correct (see 42.7). It also shows the importance of refusing to assume his nature and ways are limited to what we know and letting our understanding of him grow as we study him more. Like Job, we should not believe in order to get, but instead trust God implicitly, knowing that his purpose will be realized and that we will be glorified, no matter the trials we face (Rom 8.18-39).

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Notes

¹ Philip Yancey, *The Question That Never Goes Away*, (Brentwood, TN: Creative Trust Digital, 2013), Part 2, Kindle.

² Ironically, Zophar affirmed that the deep things of God cannot be fathomed even as he accepted the tradition that claimed to know suffering is always the result of sin (11.7-12).

³ I cannot read Job 9-10, 12-13 without recalling a Christian sister who approached me after I had preached a sermon based on those texts in which I had taken note of Job's bold questions, direct complaints, and lament that, as much as he would like to present his case before God, there was no third party who could properly arbitrate it (9.32-35). Afterward, the woman said, "I'm glad to hear it's okay to ask those kinds of questions."

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