

*The APPLIED HERMENEUTICS Series
for Pastoral Carers*

How to read the **BOOK OF JOB** : a reading aid written specifically for Pastoral Carers

“Truth is spherical and seen differently according to the culture, temperament and disposition of those who survey it.”

Amos Bronson Alcox (1799-1888)

This reading aid was written specifically for Pastoral Carers by Ross Pitt as part of a research project undertaken for award of a Master of Arts (by course work) by the University of Queensland. This research and production of the reading aid was supervised by Associate Professor Ed Conrad of the School of History, Philosophy, Religion and Classics.

This reading aid is the first in a series written to supplement the Handbook on Applied Hermeneutics that encourages pastoral carers to use the Hebrew Scriptures as a spiritual resource in their ministry.

INDEX

Page

- 1 The specific needs of Pastoral Carers
- 2 Why is the Book of Job relevant to Pastoral Care?
- 3 Stepping through the Book of Job
- 4 So what does it all mean?
- 5 List of themes relevant to pastoral care
- 6 Exercise: Analysing the Book of Job as a *Verbatim* exercise
- 7 Assignment : A theological reflection upon the Book of Job

Annexure A – Tabulation of verses in other texts that the Book of Job echoes or fractures.

Annexure B – Process used and Hermeneutical Principles applied in compiling this reading aid.

Annexure C –Dating the Book of Job with a late provenance in the Seleucid period.

Annexure D – The Book of Job and Cosmic Dualism.

Bibliography

THE SPECIFIC NEEDS OF PASTORAL CARERS

I train laity and members of religious orders to offer pastoral care within institutional settings, viz., to patients in hospitals and hospices, to residents in aged care facilities (nursing homes, hostels, and low care accommodation), to refugees in camps, to inmates in prisons and mental health facilities, and to students in educational establishments. This reading aid is written specifically to assist lay pastoral carers to use the **Book of Job** as a key scriptural resource in their work. It does not pretend to be a comprehensive Commentary designed to meet the needs of the biblical scholar, or the theologian, or the homilist or the student of literature or the general reader.

As I explain in detail below, a pastoral carer has a particular role in assisting others:

- to make sense of what is happening to them; and
- to help them plumb their own spiritual resources to deal with the situation that confronts them.

In this ministry, pastoral carers use Scripture as a resource.¹ This reading aid demonstrates how to use the Book of Job as a resource in the ministry of providing pastoral care.

What do pastoral carers do?

Pastoral carers who work in institutional settings (such as hospitals and hospices, aged care facilities, refugee camps, prisons and mental health facilities) constitute a recognisable community that shares the following characteristics:

- they are baptised Christians.
- they are practising members of a Church (Anglican, Baptist, Catholic, Uniting, etc) or Christian Fellowship.
- they have been commissioned by their Church or Fellowship to provide pastoral care in the name of their Church or Fellowship.
- increasingly they are laity (i.e., have not been ordained as sacramental ministers nor taken religious vows).
- they work in ecumenical teams and elect the leader (or coordinator) of their ecumenical teams.
- they don't provide pastoral care just to those who are practising members of their own Church or Fellowship; they are available to all they encounter (including the staff in these institutions and the relatives of those in these institutions).
- their first encounter with someone is most likely to be "cold call" (i.e., they are rarely invited to make contact first).
- most of the people they encounter are not church goers but the pastoral carers recognise them as inherently spiritual people; in fact pastoral carers don't define being "spiritual" as necessarily belonging to a Church.
- they are not visitors because they relate to people on a spiritual level.
- they don't offer to help fix "problems" (i.e., they are not mentors or counsellors; nor do they offer clinical interventions or therapy; nor are they Social Workers).

¹ See p.7 for an explanation.

- they are not ethicists; nor are they preachers; nor is their primary role to administer the sacraments.
- rather, they function in a catalytic role helping people to make sense of what is happening to them and helping them to use their own spiritual resources to cope with what is confronting them.
- they are trained in how to listen attentively to others, to appreciate the spiritual significance of what they are being told, and to respond empathically so as to help others constructively with their *own* efforts at “meaning making”².
- they don’t see God as “up there” but as existing in the world and using people of all faiths (or even of no faith) to further His purposes.
- they value other faith traditions (such as Islam or Buddhism).
- they recognise that socio-economic factors are major determinants of poor health (mental & physical) and of dysfunctional and self-harming behaviour.
- they publicly challenge reductionist views of humanity such as euthanasia, punitive penal systems, consumerism, economic determinism, the medicalisation of social problems, and genetic interventions to slow the natural ageing process.
- they recognise that they cannot function effectively as pastoral carers without a sound and sustained spiritual formation that is relevant to their calling.

Pastoral carers are thus members of an ecumenical “community” of empathic listeners who operate in a wide variety of institutional settings, offering constructive support to others in their *own* “meaning-making”, using Scripture as a resource.

What is meant by “meaning making”³?

Across both the literary arts and the sciences of the mind one will find thinkers advocating the following propositions about how human beings “make sense” of their life experiences:

- human life is developmental as well as biological (nurture as well as nature)
- most human beings typically experience their lives as an autobiographical narrative (or story) or at least a collection of autobiographical stories;
- autobiographical memory is essentially a constructive and reconstructive phenomenon rather than a reproductive one
- a narrative outlook on one’s life (a construct) is essential to a sense of personhood and well-being
- a person’s autobiographical memory (self-narrative) is not necessarily reliable because they can engage unconsciously in invention, falsification, confabulation, revisionism, and fiction
-

² This term is explained in the next Section.

³ This section was inspired by Strawson G.’s Commentary in the October 15 issue of the Times Literary Supplement. However it does not include his arguments in support of the existence of a non-narrative (or what he calls “Episodic”) form of meaning making for a very small group of people.

- the autobiographical memory or narrative is somehow related to the group of powerful emotions we associate with personal morality: pride (self-love), conceit, shame, guilt, regret, and remorse
- the autobiographical memory or narrative has a special relevance in the present time both emotionally and morally because it is the present-shaping consequences of the past that matter when we are under pressure by others, by poverty, by ill-health, by disability, by being imprisoned, etc.

These propositions might seem trite to mature adults but their efficacy is important for those whose job is to intervene to facilitate change⁴ e.g., spiritual directors, medical practitioners (especially those working in the mental health field), therapists, those working in prisoner rehabilitation programs, etc.

Because pastoral carers become quite familiar with the urge for story telling in which patients, residents, inmates, refugees, and students engage, the propositions listed above [about the nature of autobiographical narrative] take on an important significance. But pastoral carers need to understand how this narrative process works so that their listening can be more empathic, and so that they can become better at intuiting the *spiritual significance* of what they are hearing.

The story telling that pastoral carers hear from patients, residents, inmates, refugees, and students involves some sort of relatively large scale coherence-, unity-, or pattern-seeking or form-finding process of construction or shaping of life events. But they are not just producing a connected account of their life as in a family history. Whatever is going on in their heads obviously entails the ability to detect the developmental (nurture) coherences of their life (or to put it in less technical language: to apprehend the deep personal constancies that manifest themselves in their life).

The story telling that pastoral carers hear seems to be a response to the need of patients, residents, inmates, refugees, and students to explain to themselves their current predicament in terms of the bad things that have happened to them previously and how they coped on those occasions. It is the role of the pastoral carer to provide the **catalyst** for this story telling to happen. People don't seem to be able to story-tell like this to themselves; they seem to need someone else to be present, even though the listener may contribute very little to the narrative process.

While the patient, resident, inmate, etc. is engaging in this process of "meaning making" by story-telling, the pastoral carer is engaging in a **parallel** "meaning making" process of his or her own that simultaneously seeks answers to the following questions:

- have I really understood what this person is telling me? (***accurate empathic listening***)
- what is the major ***theme*** of this story?
- what ***issues*** (interpersonal etc.) does this person have?
- what ***emotions*** (fear, anger, disappointment, etc.) am I detecting?

⁴ It must be stressed that it is ***not*** the role of a pastoral carer to ***intervene to change*** someone.

- does what I am hearing make sense in terms of the theory that I was taught about personal development and reactions to loss and grief?
- what is the *spiritual significance* in what this person is telling me? (relationship with God etc.)
- what passages of Scripture come readily to my mind as I listen to this person?⁵
- how do I engage with this person at a spiritual level?

How do pastoral carers approach the Scriptures?

The shared characteristics of pastoral carers that are listed on pages 3 & 4 above do **not** transcend their individual allegiances to their Churches but they do affect the way they view the Scriptures:

- they hear Scripture calling them to the apostolic dimension of their work
- they listen to the Scriptures in order to nourish and sustain them in their apostolate
- they search Scripture for parallels that will resonate with them when they hear people “meaning making” about their experiences
- they read Scripture with people in times of distress to help them plumb their own spiritual resources
- they share the reading and hearing of Scripture and the singing of hymns⁶ as symbolic of all that they have in common as pastoral carers.
- they use the Scriptures when reflecting⁷ upon the theological implications of their encounters with individual patients, residents, inmates, refugees, and students.

Pastoral carers are but one of many communities of interpreters of Scripture. Other such communities include theologians, homilists, students of literature, and biblical scholars. The methodologies of these various communities of interpretation are not mutually exclusive but they each have a particular approach to Scripture because of what they are trying to do with it. All of these communities are engaged in *applied* hermeneutics but they are trying to do different things with the tools of hermeneutics:

- the **biblical scholar** debates which of the hermeneutical tools are relevant to Scripture, which should take priority, and how these tools should be applied.
- the **theologian** is using Scripture to proof test propositions about faith, morals and liturgy.
- the **homilist** is explaining how to make Scriptural passages from the Lectionary relevant to the demands of today;
- the **student of literature** is critically analysing Scripture in the same way as s/he would any other piece of contemporary writing.

⁵ Making such associations is an important part of the pastoral carer’s theological reflection on his/her encounters with others. **But this is not the sole value of Scripture as a resource. See p.7.**

⁶ most hymns are passages (or messages) of Scripture put to music

⁷ all training courses for pastoral carers use the Verbatim method of reflective praxis and this includes selecting and reflecting upon a text of Scripture that they feel is relevant to the particular encounter.

- the **pastoral carer** uses Scripture to help others to recognise their spiritual nature, to make sense of their world, and to use their spiritual resources to deal with what they are experiencing.

These various uses of Scripture are subtly different and it is important to understand these differences. Lack of understanding of the differences has led to serious disputation among the broader group of biblical studies professionals about everything from whether some hermeneutical tools are relevant or even legitimate to whether Scripture can sensibly be studied as a secular academic discipline without acknowledging its claims to divine inspiration.

The only way out of this maze is to acknowledge, as I do in the quote from Amos Alcox on the coversheet to this reading aid, that the *truth* is spherical and that nobody is capable of seeing it entirely. This proposition differs entirely from the proposition that there can be *no truth* because everything is a personal construction and thus relative.

What is meant by saying Scripture is a resource for pastoral carers?

The function of Scripture is not just to help the care-giver to try to find a one-to-one correspondence between a particular passage of Scripture and the specific situation of the person being ministered to. This *can* happen; but it is not necessary to find such one-to-one correspondences.

The real value of Scripture as a resource for pastoral carers resides in the *possibilities*⁸ that the Scripture offers the care-seeker to see things from God's perspective (and not just their own). This is precisely the theme of God's response to Job's long complaint about his undeserved suffering.

⁸ This Section was inspired by Schweider C.L.S.'s article titled "*Song of Songs – a metaphorical vision for pastoral care.*" in the Journal titled *Interpretation* Vol. 59 No.3 July 2005. She applies to the *Song of Songs* the four principles of Scripture's role in pastoral care and counselling as articulated by Capps D., "*The Bible's Role in Pastoral Care and Counselling: Four Basic Principles*" *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* Vol 3 (18984) pp10-13.

WHY IS THE BOOK OF JOB RELEVANT TO PASTORAL CARE?

When I trawl⁹ around hospital wards and aged care facilities introducing myself as a Catholic Chaplain, I often encounter people who respond almost immediately along these lines:

“I don’t know why God is doing this to me.”

“I don’t know what I’ve done to deserve this.”

“I’m angry with God. Why is He doing this to me?”

“I’m a good person; I don’t deserve this.”

“Why would God do this to me?”

“I must be a very evil person.”

And of course there are the laconic men from the Outback with their colourful :

“Must have killed a Chinaman.”¹⁰

“Must have really f...ed up somewhere, mate.”

When I was a novice Pastoral Carer I used to panic and resort to apologetics:

“Do you really think that God would set out to harm you? God is not like that. He is loving etc”

In time I came to realize that most of these people have a concept of God more akin to what we read in the Hebrew Scriptures.

This reaction is but one of the reasons¹¹ why the Hebrew Scriptures are an important resource for Pastoral Carers. Yet notions of God are just part of the issue. The real challenge for Pastoral Carers is to help people make sense of what is happening to them and to help them plumb their own spiritual resources. In this regard the Book of Job is a particularly useful resource, because, fundamentally, the Book of Job is all about making sense about what is happening and plumbing one’s spiritual resources.

The **Book of Job** is not just a useful scriptural resource for pastoral carers; it can also be read to challenge one’s modern *secular* assumptions that:

- mankind’s fate on this earth should differ from that which afflicts other creatures.
- suffering is intrinsically wrong for mankind and should be rectified.
- the workings of our world should be governed by principles of justice and natural law (articulated into a set of inalienable enforceable *rights*).¹²
- every part of the cosmos will ultimately be explainable in terms of natural properties and processes (i.e., there is no supernatural mystery).

⁹ Pastoral Care has an apostolic dimension that is best conveyed by two metaphors from the Good News of Jesus (The) Christ:

- *Duc in altum* – Head out into the deep For I mean to make of you fishers of mankind.
- *Ego sum vitis* - I am the vine; you are the branchesSeparated from me you can achieve nothing.

¹⁰ Back in the days of the Gold Rush in Australia (1850s – 1890s) Caucasians competed aggressively with the Chinese to find and extract gold. But to actually kill a Chinaman was considered the harbinger of particularly bad luck.

¹¹ See the full list of reasons at page in the Praxis Handbook No. 3 on Using the Hebrew Scriptures in Pastoral Care

¹² [The lineage of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights goes back via a complicated path to the *Leviathan* by Thomas Hobbes \(1588-1679\). Both the title and the content of this formative work of political philosophy owed much to Chapter 41 of the Book of Job. See Tuck R.’s *Hobbes*, Oxford, OUP\(1989\).](#)

- mankind's basic instinct is simply to maximize personal advantage (this motivation is usually expressed by the term "self-interest").

"Self-interest" is the foundational principle of Capitalism; and the question as to whether this principle is a normative pre-supposition (in lay language: "an obvious *given*") of Economics or a pro-position that can be "proof tested" is attracting the attention of theologians, secular philosophers, and behavioral economists.

The Book of Job "proof tests" this principle of self-interest and demonstrates how impoverished being human could become if everything were analysed solely through such a utilitarian lens as "self-interest".

This issue is right at the heart of one of Continental Philosophy's points of engagement with Science¹³ :

- is there a **truth** that is beyond the reach of Science (human understanding) because it is reserved for "a divine understanding"; and
- is it **possible** for mankind to participate in this "divine understanding".

Both of these questions are central to the Book of Job.

However, the Book of Job deals with these two questions in a far more accessible way than the works of philosophy. This is because of a paradox: the conceptualization processes that go on within Science and Philosophy are usually formulated in ways that have their origins in Classic Greek. The Greek language (especially the flexible way in which compound words could be formed) is particularly suited to this task. The Hebrew language, on the other hand, has a poor capacity for articulating conceptual ideas with precision, but it possesses a certain style of epistemology, an earthiness, that allows authors to demonstrate visually and aurally what they want to **contest** and how they **feel**. This reading aid will demonstrate how the Hebrew language does this.

In this reading aid I also canvas my theory¹⁴ that the Book of Job, in the form that has come down to us, :

- was probably produced in the Seleucid period.
- was structured in such a way as to demonstrate the seven dimensions of Cosmic Dualism and has the number 7 as an organising feature.
- questions the efficacy of human ways of trying to attain an understanding of the divine; and parodies, especially, the Greek style of formal argumentative process
- was probably meant to be read allegorically: Job's first test being an allegory for the Babylonian Exile; and Job's the second test being an allegory for the far more serious, "near death" experience of the Seleucid King Antiochus Epiphanes' assault on Jewish religion and culture.

This theory explains the Book's authentic feel as an expression of major loss and grief. It also accounts for why the highly skeptical Book was treasured within the Hebrew Scripture canon.

I suggest you read Annexures C & D before you begin going through the 20 STEPS. You will get far more out of the Book if you have this broader perspective on what the author(s)' bigger agenda appears to have been.

¹³ A recent special issue of the Journal of the theoretical humanities titled *Angelaki* Vol. 10 No. 2 August 2005 deals comprehensively with the epistemological problems that philosophers encounter in trying to express this argument.

¹⁴ Detailed in Annexures C & D.

STEPPING THROUGH THE BOOK OF JOB

In my experience, a modern day reader cannot just pick up the Book of Job, read it from cover to cover, and expect to make much sense of it. Although it is only 50 or so pages long, readers will quickly lose their way and, more than likely, give up out of boredom. Moreover:

- unless one is very familiar with the Hebrew Scriptures s/he cannot hear the verses in this text:
 - resonating or echoing verses in other texts
 - causing dissonance or fracturing the verses in other texts
- unless the text is read in Hebrew it is impossible to see the visual literary devices (parallelisms, puns, etc) that the authors of this text use in their extended similes and other metaphors to convey meaning or to fracture meaning
- unless readers are familiar with Hebrew poetry they cannot sense the way structure is used to achieve sense or to fracture sense

So it is absolutely essential to be guided through the text by a tutor who has been trained to do these things; hence this reading aid.

What follows is the 20 STEP process¹⁵ that I have developed to help trainee pastoral carers to understand the text and get the most out of it as a theological resource of immediate relevance to ministry. I have never had a trainee who did not find the gain worth the pain.

The 20 Step process assumes that readers have little or no familiarity with the Hebrew Scriptures or the hermeneutics of biblical scholarship. The only resources needed in order to work through the 20 Steps are a Christian Bible, a pile of bookmarks and a lot of patience.

My objective in producing this reading aid on the Book of Job is simply to encourage my readers to mine this text for insights relevant to ministry.

Methodology used in producing this reading aid

This reading aid does the following :

- it provides an eclectic synthesis of those explanatory notes from twenty major Commentaries¹⁶ on the Book of Job that I think are necessary to a rounded understanding of the text as a whole. The task of separating out what is essential from what is interesting is a question of judgment; and I hope I am not guilty of undue compression of the explanatory notes in these valuable Commentaries.
- it refers to verses in other Books of Scripture that the text of the Book of Job either echoes or challenges. So much of the meaning of the Book of Job is missed if these resonances are not heard.¹⁷
- it distils the findings of biblical scholarship in books and academic journals on the Book of Job that cannot be readily accessed except through a University library.
- it offers my theories about the Book of Job and my own insights about the relevance of the Book of Job to pastoral carers

¹⁵ Normally completed over three two hour tutorials.

¹⁶ See the Bibliography for the publication details of these Commentaries.

¹⁷ See Annexure A for a tabulation of the more important of these verses.

The mere attempt to produce a reading aid on the Book of Job means that I have knowingly entered a veritable minefield within biblical scholarship. In Annexure B I chart in detail my path through the various risks inherent in producing a reading aid of this type on this most difficult of the Books of the Hebrew Scriptures.

STEP ONE

Look up the index of the Old Testament part of any Christian Bible and the Book of Job can be found about half way through the list.

Because it is necessary to leaf back and forth looking at how the Book of Job echoes verses in other Books in the Hebrew Scriptures some grasp is needed as to how the various Books relate to one another.

In the Jewish tradition, the collection of texts, that Christians call the Old Testament, is referred to as the **TANAKH** which is an acronym (or one word contraction of the names given to the three groups of texts that the Jews regarded as canonical):

TORAH [Teachings or Instruction or that which hits the mark – derived from the Hebrew root letters y-r-h meaning “to shoot (an arrow)”]. This canonical group of texts comprises the Books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy – sometimes called *The Five Books of Moses* or the *Pentateuch* [a term derived via Latin from the Greek *penta* (five) *teuchoi* (books)]. They are regarded as a unity and thus written on a single long scroll.¹⁸ This group of texts has always been accorded the status of the holiest of holy texts and given precedence over the other canonical groups of texts.

NEVI'IM [Prophets]. This canonical group of texts comprises the Books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Twelve Minor Prophets and are a combination of historical type accounts of what happened after the Chosen People entered the Promised Land plus recollections of the words and deeds of the Prophets.

KETHUVIM [Writings]. This canonical group of texts (comprising the Psalms and Books of Proverbs, **Job**, The Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Qoheleth¹⁹, Esther, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, First Chronicles and Second Chronicles) is a hotchpotch of historical works, prayers, wisdom literature and apocalyptic prophecy.

Merely note at present that the Book of Job is in this third canonical grouping.

The anthologizing of the various Books of Hebrew Scripture into these three categories and the juxtaposing of texts within each of these three categories was obviously not a happenchance. The scribes (or whoever else) who did the compiling wanted to predispose readers/hearers to accepting ***how*** they read these texts and the ***context*** in which they interpreted them. There were certainly liturgical (lectionary) reasons for anthologizing and sequencing these texts in the form²⁰ that has come down to us.

¹⁸ from as early as the beginning of the first millennium at least.

¹⁹ Called *Ecclesiastes* in Christian Bibles.

²⁰ Both the Masoretic Text version plus the Targums (or variations).

The best way for me to illustrate this point about anthologizing and juxtaposing texts is to draw your attention to the current craze for publishing eclectic collections of extracts under various topics both serious and trite. A really apt example is the recent book of readings on *Existentialism* edited by Solomon R.C.²¹ which contains extracts from the works of those major philosophers²² universally recognized as Existentialists : Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Jaspers, Satre, and Merleau-Ponty. Also included are extracts from less famous thinker/writers who could be “implicated” with existentialism depending upon how you define the term : de Unamuno, Marcel, de Beauvoir, Hazel, Barnes, Martin Buber, Paul Tillich, Keiji Nishitani, Colin Wilson, and Victor Frankl. Then there are extracts from writers whose existentialist credentials are embedded in more literary genres : Turgenev, Dostoyevsky, Hesse, Rilke, Kaska, Camus, Marquez, Beckett, Borges, Pinter, Heller, Roth, and Miller. The point of compiling such a broad collection of extracts is that, while some of these extracts are accepted as “definitive” of Existentialism, all the extracts are relevant and potentially enlightening.

The anthologizing and sequencing of texts that comprise the Hebrew Scripture canon was probably motivated by a similar desire to produce a comprehensive compilation of “inspired” texts in a way that acknowledged the precedence to be accorded the individual texts, yet place like genres together, with individual texts sequenced in some order that made sense at the time (e.g., assumed chronological order, or traditional association).

The Christian Bible itself illustrates this point about the anthologizing and sequencing of texts. The canon²³ of the Hebrew Scriptures was adopted by the early Christian Church because these scriptures could be read as *prefiguring* Jesus (the) Christ. This canon was placed in front of the Good News of Jesus (the) Christ for chronological reasons. However the usual order of the canon of the Hebrew Scriptures was changed to place the Nevi’im [Prophets] last because these texts were interpreted as more clearly promising the advent of Jesus (the) Christ.

As readers become more familiar with the Hebrew Scripture canon they begin to see the very clear echoes of these texts in the Good News of Jesus (the) Christ. For example, in STEP SIXTEEN, I will demonstrate the obvious influence on the Prologue to John’s Gospel of the various hymns to Wisdom in the Hebrew Scripture canon, especially Chapter 28 of the Book of Job.

STEP TWO

Read Genesis 25:19 to 28.9, then 32, 33, and 35:27-29 about *Esau* and his connection with *Edom*. Read also Deuteronomy 2:12 & 22.

Note carefully that :

- *Esau* wagered away his birthright and lost his father’s blessing (including his rightful inheritance) by Isaac’s opportunistic and culpable deception.
- The land of *Seir* is mentioned frequently and is part of the land of the *Edom*, where the descendants of *Esau* settle
- Esau was allowed by God to *dispossess* the indigenous *Horites* of *Seir* in order (like *Lot*) to be separated from God’s chosen people (i.e., *Israel/Isaac’s* descendants)

²¹ Solomon R.C. (ed.), *Existentialism*, Oxford, OUP (2005)

²² Many in this list, like Satre, were not just philosophers.

²³ Or more accurately, what was thought at the time to be the canon of the Hebrew Scriptures.

STEP THREE

Read Genesis 36 and note that :

- care has been taken to distinguish between the *Horite* of *Seir* genealogies (Genesis 36:20-29) and the *Esau* genealogies.
- *Uz* is the eldest son of *Dishan* the youngest son (of seven!!!) of *Seir* the *Horite*.
- there are frequent references to *Eliphaz* (Genesis 36:4,10,11, 12, 15, & 16) as a son of *Esau*.
- there are frequent references to *Teman* (Genesis 36:11, 15, 34, & 42) as a son of *Eliphaz* and as a clan name.
- There is no patriarchal story about Esau's descendants at the end of the genealogies. There is a plausible case for arguing that an original patriarchal story has been excised from here, probably because of anti-*Edomite* feeling (explained in the next STEP).

STEP FOUR

Read Job 1.1 . Names in the Hebrew Scriptures are usually significant. The etymology of the name *Job* is uncertain. In Hebrew it could mean *object of enmity/hostility* or *where is (my) Father (God)?*; in Aramaic it could mean *he who turns (to God)*. All three meanings make sense in describing what happens to Job on his spiritual journey. Such ambiguities in meaning are characteristic of Semitic languages but these ambiguities are often used by authors to quicken our curiosity. We sometimes find the same thing in English (e.g. the film title "Jaws") but it rarely works as well in English as it does in the Semitic languages.

Now read Job 1:1 against the background of what you just read in Genesis 29:19 to 36 and Deuteronomy 2 and think about what the reference to *Uz* would have conjured up in the mind of the original readers of this text.

The upright and God-fearing patriarch Job is a wealthy pastoralist from *Uz* which is in the land of *Seir*, the land *dispossessed* by *Esau*. He is not a descendant of *Esau*, the *Edomite*, rather he is a victim of *Esau's* (or *Edomite*) *dispossession* of the indigenous *Horite* people .

To the ears of an original reader of the Book of Job this indirect reference to *Edomites* would have put them on their guard because of Israel's long-standing tension and enmity with the *Edomites*: firstly over the *Edomites*' obstruction and lack of humanity during the Exodus (Read Numbers 20:14-21) secondly, because *Edom* had been conquered by King David (Read 2 Samuel 8:13-14); & thirdly, because, during the conquest of Jerusalem by the Babylonians, the *Edomites* had joined in the assault. (You must read Psalm 137:7-9; Isaiah 34 and 63:1-6; Jeremiah 49:7-22; Lamentations 4:21-22; Ezekiel 25: 12, 35 & 36; Malachi 1:1 and Obadiah to sense the vehemence in Israel's cry to God for revenge against *Edom*).

- Note also in these passages the frequency with which *Seir* and *Temen* are used as synonyms for *Edom*.)

STEP FIVE

Read Job 1:1-5.

- Note that the opening formula (e.g., “A man there was called Job”) echoes that of other patriarchal stories in the Book of Genesis and is like our : “Once upon a time...”
- Note Genesis 6:9 where Noah’s virtue is described in similar terms. But Job is described via four - not just two - qualities (in two paired pairs) and so is presented as being exceptionally virtuous. Note that *blameless* in Hebrew carries the connotation of wholeness = integrity. In Hebrew, *fear of God* means respectful unsentimental piety. *Fear of God* is the major principle in the Covenant (read Deuteronomy 10:12-13) and in the **KETHUVIM** group of texts²⁴. (For two good examples read Proverbs 1.7 and Ecclesiastes 12.13). In the Hebrew Scriptures, to do *evil* is to go contrary to the ordinances of God.
- Note the use of symbolic numbers : 3 + 7 = 10 = completeness/perfection (ditto 5 + 5)
- Read Genesis 26:12-14, Psalm 25:12-13; Psalm 112:1-3; Psalm 128:1-4; Proverbs 3:33; and Proverbs 10:22 where piety leads to blessings. The implication is that just as Job’s piety is complete and perfect then so also are his blessings (family and possessions). In Job 1.3 we are told he was peerless in possessions. In Job 1.8 God says that he is peerless in virtue.
- Read Exodus 22:27; Leviticus 24:14-16; and 1 Kings 21:10. Cursing/blaspheming God was a serious sin punishable by death.
- Read Genesis 18:16-33 where Abraham successfully negotiates with God to save Sodom from its fate if he can find a few upright people there. Abraham gives up trying to find any righteous people there and is *powerless* to prevent Sodom being destroyed.
- Read Ezekiel 14:12-20 where Noah, Dan(i)el and Job are listed as the hallmarks of uprightness; but God says to Ezekiel that even these upright men would be *powerless* in saving their families or countrymen in the face of his wrath. *The upright can save only themselves*.
- Read Exodus 19:10 & 14 about purification prior to ritual. Note that Job is functioning like Moses in this regard.
- Read Leviticus 5:4-5 regarding the Offerings required for Sin and Guilt actions (even if unintentional) and note how extremely scrupulous Job is in taking precautions to even make Sin and Guilt offerings just in case one of his children may have sinned and cursed God *in their thoughts*.

You need to be aware that, in Hebrew, the root letters b-r-k for the word “bless” / ”blessing” are also used euphemistically throughout the Book of Job to mean “curse” / “blaspheme”. This device is very important as we shall see in the next STEP.

²⁴ See Step One for the list of Books that this group of texts comprise.

STEP SIX

Read Job 1:6-19 and note in particular that:

- God observes (at Job 1:8) that there is nobody else in the whole world like the blameless and upright Job who *fears God* and shuns evil. The original readers would also have remembered from Job 1:1 that the most virtuous man on earth was (like themselves) peerless in blessings but also the victim of *dispossession* by an *Edomite*.
- The Satan²⁵ (whose role here is more akin to that of a counsel assisting in a formal inquiry before God in the court of heaven) poses a question to God {not Job}: surely Job has good reason to *fear* you, God, because you have protected him, his family, and his possessions and you have blessed his efforts with boundless material rewards?
- In the classic move of a skilled counsel (debater) the Satan narrows in on only one of Job's four virtues (viz., *fear* of the Lord) and he narrowly defines this *fear* as worry of loss of God's protection and favour. This narrowing of the notion of *fear of God* expresses a highly reductionist view of humankind, viz., humankind are motivated solely to maximize their self-interest. This is the foundational principle of Utilitarianism and of what today is called "economic rationalism". Disinterested piety and human virtue do not get a mention. Now you can see the relevance of the Book of Job for our own times!²⁶
- The Satan then issues a challenge to God : take away everything Job has and he will surely "curse" you to your face. (Note that "curse" is a euphemistic use of the Hebrew root letters b-r-k meaning "bless". The implication created by this literary device is that humankind are the negative of a "blessing" in that they are so driven by self-interest that they are incapable of even the basic disposition of piety, viz., they have no *fear*, awe, respect, etc. for God.)
- God accepts the Satan's challenge to put Job to the test!!!! This is the crux of the whole Book.
- God stipulates that the Satan is not to harm Job's person.²⁷
- Then Job suddenly loses everything (children, retainers, flocks, and buildings) in four²⁸ dreadful calamities (an earthquake, a volcanic like firestorm and two unprovoked bloody incursions and depredations by war parties). Such calamities are still the staples of our nightly news coverage.
- The \$64 question is: if Job losses all he has will he cease practising the four virutes?
 - blamelessness
 - uprightness
 - fear of God
 - shunning evil

²⁵ In Hebrew, the use of the definite article means that "the Satan" is a title or job description, not a personal name.

²⁶ In Chapter 5 of this reading aid I list this and six other pastoral themes for which the Book of Job is a good resource.

²⁷ Remember that in Step Five we read that the upright can save themselves (but not others) through their piety.

²⁸ Note the structural feature here : the fourfold destruction parallels the four virtues.

STEP SEVEN

Read Job 1:20-22 and note that:

- Job's gestures of robe tearing, hair cropping, and falling to the ground echo similar behaviour in Genesis 37:34 (Jacob mourning Joseph), Joshua 7:6 (after the defeat by the Amorites), 2 Samuel 1:11 (David mourning Saul & Jonathan); 3:31 (David mourning Abner) et seq., Jeremiah 7:29 and Ezekiel 7:18. The triple gesture is unique and suggests extreme grief.
- Job's utterance "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked I shall go back again. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord!" has become one of the most cited verses of the Bible and is universally used in funeral services. It taps the deep spiritual understanding that our life-force is God's to dispose of.
- Contrary to the Satan's prediction, Job, even in his extreme grief, worships God, does not curse God, nor does he reproach God. So QED²⁹, Job, despite the trauma and enormity of his losses, remains pious.
- Your role as pastoral carer is to be a catalyst to help those suffering loss and grief to achieve this level of pious acceptance. As a pastoral carer you will be struck by this absolute statement of pious acceptance in the face of so many losses. Normally you would expect a person suffering such major losses and such intense grief to go through a process of trauma, denial, bartering, anger, and questioning before "working" to this level of pious acceptance of the will of God. As shall be seen in STEP ELEVEN, Job seeks to reverse God's creation. You need to be alert to the fact that Job reverses the normal grief process too.

STEP EIGHT

Read Job 2:1-6 and note that:

- God repeats that virtuous Job is still peerless on earth and still persists in his integrity.
- God points out to the Satan that he has lost his wager: "you (Satan) have achieved nothing by provoking Me to ruin Job".
- In the typical move of a skilled counsel (debater) the Satan retorts: "but you did not take away everything he has; of course he will give away all he has to save his skin; afflict his bone & flesh and he will *curse* you to your face."³⁰
- God accepts the Satan's challenge to put Job to an even harder test!!!!

STEP NINE

Read Job 2:7-10 and think carefully about Job's exchange with his wife.

- Remember that in STEP FIVE we saw that to curse God carried the death penalty.
- Read Genesis Ch 3 and identify the similarities and differences with Job 2:7-10 eg., Job, unlike Adam, was not persuaded by his wife to do something wrong.
- There are two accounts of Creation in Genesis – the first that emphasizes the goodness of God's creative acts. The second account describes the presence of evil and the fall of mankind. This little exchange between Job and his wife could be a pointer to the reader/hearer to be prepared to hear more about human thinking versus the divine thinking. This is one aspect of the Cosmic Dualism that I describe in Annexure D.

²⁹ Quod est demonstrandum = it is proven

³⁰ See Annexure D where I read this passage as an allegory for the Seleucid King Antiochus Ephiphanes' assault on Jewish religion and culture.

Read Job 2:11-13 and think about the pastoral care implications of what Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar are doing.

STEP TEN

Before proceeding, you need to get some feel for the overall structure of the Book of Job or you will get lost and give up. Biblical scholars have various theories about how the Book achieved its present shape (and how it should be reshaped for logical sense)³¹ but I am only interested in how to make sense of it in its current form.

Treating the Book of Job as a single literary entity, and applying the old adage that *Form follows Function*, I think that the Book of Job makes sense if viewed as having a seven part structure, i.e., structured into seven cycles of speeches:

Speech Cycle One

Ch 1 God & Satan talk about Job's integrity
 Job's first test

Speech Cycle Two

Ch 2 God and Satan talk again about Job's integrity
 Job's second test
 Job's exchange with his wife on the subject of his integrity

Speech Cycle Three

Ch 3 Job's lament (indirect *curse*)
Chs 4&5 Eliphaz responds to Job
Chs 6&7 Job replies to Eliphaz
Ch 8 Bildad responds to Job
Chs 9 &10 Job replies to Bildad
Chs 9&10 Zophar responds to job
Chs 12-14 Job replies to Zophar

Speech Cycle Four

Ch 15 Eliphaz responds to Job
Chs 16&17 Job replies to Eliphaz
Ch 18 Bildad responds to Job
Ch 19 Job replies to Bildad
Ch 20 Zophar responds to Job
Ch 21 Job replies to Zophar

Speech Cycle Five

Ch 22 Eliphaz responds to Job
Chs 22&23 Job replies to Eliphaz
Ch 25 Bildad responds to Job
Chs 26-27 Job replies to Bildad

NB Zophar does not speak because the debate fizzles out.

³¹ If you are interested in this subject, there is a good overview of the main theories in Chapter 5 of Volume 3 of a reasonably accessible set of teaching aids written for theology students titled: *Exploring the Old Testament*. London: SPCK (2003). This particular Volume was written by Lucas E.

Speech Cycle Six

- Ch 28-31 Job summarises his case (starting with biblical scholars call the Hymn to Wisdom in Ch 28)
- Ch 32-37 Elihu (a new character) sums up, adds some new points of his own, and adjudicates against Job

Speech Cycle Seven

- Ch 38-41 God responds directly to Job
- Ch 42:1-6 Job apologises to God and withdraws his charge
- Ch 42:7-15 God's judgment about who is telling the truth

The number seven is symbolic in the Hebrew Scriptures and is generally used to convey the idea of the completion of God's mystical purpose. In the Book of Job, the number seven is an organizing feature. Here are some of the more obvious examples :

- Job is from the land of Uz who was the eldest son of Dishan who was in turn the son (the youngest son of seven) of Seir the Horite.
- Job starts with seven sons
- Job and his comforters sit on the ground for seven days and seven nights in silence
- There are seven characters who engage Job :
 - His wife
 - His three comforters (Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar)
 - Wisdom
 - Elihu
 - God
- Job's lamentation (Job 3) contains seven strophes in 24 lines and 14 incantations.
- Eliphaz (Job 5:19) references the seven things God hates (Leviticus 6:11-19)
- Job replies seven times to his comforters.
- Job lists seven reasons why he was respected and deferred to before his undeserved calamities.
- Elihu provides seven reasons for Job's being wrong in how he interprets God's treatment of him.
- Job gets seven new sons and lives 140 years (a score of 7 years)
- Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar have to provide Job with a sin offering of seven bulls and seven rams.

As well as debating the structure of the Book of Job, biblical scholars speculate about the genre of the Book : is it a legal proceeding? Is it a symposium (dramatic dialogue or debate)? Is it a diatribe (different viewpoints argued in speech form)? Whatever its genre, the Book has a serious theological purpose and I believe in the old adage: ***Form follows Function***. In my view, the indefiniteness of the genre and the Book's fractured structure, its confusion of points of view, and its profusion of metaphor are deliberate and meant to convey a lot more than just the traumatized state of Job in his loss and grief. Annexure D outlines my theory that the Book is structured around the seven dimensions of Cosmic Dualism, and that the Book's rhetorical devices are designed to pitch human ways of attaining understanding against divine ways of understanding and to parody the former, especially the efficacy of the Greek style of formal argumentative process.

STEP ELEVEN

Now go to the end of the Book and Read Ch 42:7-17, usually referred to by biblical scholars as the Epilogue, and note that:

- Job is vindicated as telling the **truth** (speaking rightly) about God
- God is “angry” (this a very strong word!) with Eliphaz and his two companions³² for not telling the **truth** (speaking rightly) about Him; and directs them to atone via Job’s intercession and sin offering
- God restores Job’s possessions twofold (without him having to confess his guilt)
- God blesses Job with seven (the number signifying the completion of God’s mystical purpose) new sons and three new daughters who receive names that symbolize their attractiveness: Jemimah (dove), Keziah (precious perfume), Keren-happuch (mascara jar). They too are doubly blessed in receiving an inheritance in their own right. Recall what you read in Steps One to Four that Job, the indigenous Horite, was dispossessed by the Esau who in turn was dispossessed by Isaac.
- Job lives 140 years {2 x 70 [three score plus 10] = twice the blessing of a full life span} and dies peacefully in the bosom of his extended family (to the third generation) just like the venerable patriarchs (Abraham and Isaac).

STEP TWELVE

Recall that in Step Six (Ch 1:6-19) the issue that the Satan raised was whether Job was righteous *because* God had blessed him or whether Job was blessed *because* he was righteous. Has this issue been resolved? The answer appears to be : well, only if you stop at the end of Chapter 2. At that point God has clearly won the two challenges thrown down by the Satan. Job remains righteous despite the Satan’s intervention to strip him of his possessions, family and health.³³

While Job’s initial reaction to his losses (Ch 1:21-22 and Ch 2:10) are righteous, seven !!!! days later he utters a lament (in Ch 3) in the form of 14 incantations that seek to reverse God’s creation in Genesis 1:1-19. In the next STEP this lamentation is analysed.

From Chs 4 to 31 there is a contest between Job and his companions over the issue of Divine Retribution. Unaware of the circumstances of the Satan’s challenge to God, Job’s companions confront Job with the proposition that he must have sinned to deserve God’s depriving him of his possessions, family and health. In their view, Job needs to repent. In theology, this proposition is called the principle of Divine Retribution.

When you read Chs 4 to 31 you will see that the issue for Job’s three companions is the evident operation of this principle of Divine Retribution in the experience of mankind. Job bitterly rejects the allegation that he has done anything to deserve such punishment and he challenges both them and God to show him where he has sinned. In Job’s various challenges both to his companions and to God we witness some of the most anti-God sentiments in biblical literature.

In Ch 42:7 the issue for God is : who is telling the **truth** (speaking rightly) about Me – Job or his companions? God comes down on Job’s side and expresses his anger at Job’s companions presumably for pressing their simplistic views on the operation of the principle of Divine Retribution.

³² note: Elihu is not mentioned

³³ note: we don’t hear about the Satan again after Ch 2.

In STEP EIGHTEEN you will read God's response (Ch 38 to 41) to Job's challenge to explain what he has done to deserve such punishment. In STEP NINETEEN you will read Job's reply (Ch 42: 1-6). These are the most interesting and thought-provoking Chapters in the Book and very challenging for pastoral carers.

STEP THIRTEEN

Now go back and read Job Ch 3³⁴ and then read Genesis 1:1-19 and note that:

- Job's lamentation contains seven strophes in 24 lines organized as follows: 4,4; 3,3,3; 4,3.
- the reference to 7 !!! days in Job 2:13 echoes Genesis 1:1-2.4a
- in Job 3:1, Job *curses* his birthday and the night of his conception. Is this not an euphemistic way of *cursing God*? Does this make the Satan's prediction right after all?
- Leviathan is mentioned in Job 3:8 because it was thought that eclipses occurred when Leviathan swallowed the sun and made the earth dark. Leviathan (the cause of chaos) was believed to be roused to action by sorcerers and magicians.
- The term "hemmed in" is used ironically. Satan used the same term in Job 1:10 to describe why Job was protected by God from harm.
- Job 3:4-10 comprises 14 incantations that *seek to reverse* the process of God's creation in Genesis 1:1-19 and return the created *order* to its original state of murk-black *disorder*.
- The reference in Job 3:20 to "bitter in spirit" is literally "bitter of throat". Behind this expression is the idea that in great distress the intestines put pressure on the liver and heart, breaking them down (hence the origin of the term "broken-hearted") turning them into a liquid that passes through the throat leaving a bitter taste; that liquid then exits the eyes as tears.
- Job 3:3-26 closely parallels the sentiment if not, in some cases, the exact words of Jeremiah 20:14-18. They also echo Elijah's words in 1 Kings 4 and Jonah's words in Jonah 4.3. In STEP FIVE we saw Job functioning like Moses as priest. Here we are invited to see Job as railing against the circumstances he finds himself in like the Prophets of old who felt they has been betrayed by God not backing them in their calling. This is a very powerful questioning of God's purpose as explained by the TORAH and the NEVI'IM (Prophets).

INTRODUCTION TO STEPS FOURTEEN TO NINETEEN

Before you begin to read Chs 4 to 42 you need to be aware of the following points:

- This part of the Book has been structured as a formal argumentative process that the Greeks were particularly fond of and that continued to be used until the end of the Medieval period. (It survives in a condensed form in school and University debating contests and in some of the more adversarial Ph.D. assessment processes). In this type of argumentative process Person A states a proposition and Person B raises objections to it. Person A then responds to Person B. Person C then raises objections and Person A responds to Person C. Person D then raises objections and Person A replies to Person D. This goes on for three cycles and Person A then summarises their case and a neutral party then adjudicates.
- My theory³⁵ is that Chs 4 to 37 should be read as a parody of the efficacy of this style of formal argumentative process in coming to grips with the truth about anything serious like

³⁴ Ch 3 begins of the third Cycle of Speeches described in STEP TEN

-
- the reason for Job's predicament.³⁶ The speeches are longwinded and the content otiose. The process finally fizzles out with Zophar not even participating in the final cycle of the argument.
- Starting with a Hymn to Wisdom, Job then sums up his case. Elihu sums up the arguments, adds points of his own, and adjudicates against Job.
- While Job's comforters are conducting their formal argumentative process Job tries to initiate (in parallel) a court proceeding where he charges God to justify the losses and suffering He (God) has inflicted upon him (Job) and to exercise judgement against him (Job) if he is guilty of any serious offence. Job also charges his comforters with bearing false witness against him and seeks judgement against them.
- God responds directly to Job in Ch 38 to 41.
- Job apologises to God and withdraws his charge in Ch 42:1-6. You will recall from STEP TWELVE that God, in a very surprising move, vindicates Job and condemns (in legal language) the three comforters for not telling the truth about Him (God).

I have a theory that:

- the etymology behind **Job's** name and the reference to **Uz** are probably pointers that the **Book of Job** should be read allegorically i.e., Job should be seen as a symbol of Israel **fated**, like the Horites, to be **dispossessed** as part of God's mysterious purposes, without them necessarily being to blame for what happened. **Job** is an **innocent victim** of dispossession, just like the Horites, who suffered because their fate was "**divined**".
- the two tests or trials that Job undergoes are probably meant to be read as symbols for two different types of **dispossession**:
 - Job's first trial is a symbol for the Babylonian Exile where Israel was **dispossessed** of its religious centre, its independent nationhood and many of its people, and where its leadership were exiled to Babylon.
 - Job's second trial is a symbol of the Seleucid King's³⁷ "Hellenisation" (viz., a process of enforced adoption of Greek ways) of Palestine which was a much more deadly catastrophe because it struck at the heart of Israel's self-understanding and personality, viz., its religion and culture.
- the reference to falling darkness in Job 3:9 is the opposite of the great light dawning for "the people that walked in darkness" in Isaiah 9:1 which was a promise of deliverance for those deported to Syria when the Northern Kingdom fell in 734 BC. This deliverance never eventuated. The Book of Job frequently questions the efficacy of the promises of the Prophets and challenges their message that Israel deserved its fate. This chapter echoes Psalm 22 in particular and also Psalms 13, 42/3, 44, 74, 77, and 88 which have much the same questioning and express the same angst. I think that the whole Chapter was meant to be read allegorically as a question: why did God bother to save Moses from death at birth in order to release the captive Israelites from slavery in Egypt, if their current lot in Exile is slavery again (i.e., a reversal to their original state of slavery) particularly when they can't discern His purpose? God has become for Israel a taskmaster to His slaves. As we proceed reading the Book of Job I think you can discern how the author(s) of this text challenge :
 - the view of the Prophets that Israel *deserved* its fate
 - the message of the Wisdom tradition that good living brings its own reward
 - the underlying theme of Genesis (and other Books of Torah) that mankind (and especially Israel) has a special relationship with God.

³⁵ See Annexure D.

³⁶ St. Paul says something similar following his encounter with Greek debaters.

³⁷ See Annexure D.

- These challenges to the traditional forms of “meaning making” in the Hebrew Scriptures plus Job’s extensive diatribes about divine absence, lack of hope in resurrection after death, and lack of hope in divine justice lend a decidedly tragic dimension to the Book which the “happy ending” does nothing to ameliorate. The tragedy lies in the lot of humankind – doomed to exist on earth without being able to comprehend the purposes of God: either His

benevolence or His allowing bad things to happen to good people. For mankind, humble acceptance of the inscrutable will of God is the only path to transcendence.

- Job is not just a person; Job is also an allegory for Israel’s experience of the Exile to Babylon and the Seleucid “Hellenisation” of Palestine, when all previous “meaning making” about Israel being God’s *chosen people* is called into question and answers are being sought as what happened and why. As we shall see, the Book of Job challenges all three of the earlier “meaning making” conceptualizations of Israel (Covenant, Prophecy, and Wisdom) and comes to the conclusion that what happened to Job (Israel) is a mystery and beyond man’s understanding. Bad things do happen to good people because it is the will of God to allow it to happen. Humble acceptance of God’s will is the source of virtue and eventual reward.

There are many layers of meaning in the Book of Job; it is an extremely complex and cleverly wrought yet “dark” text. This makes it a very good theological resource for pastoral carers ministering to people (in hospitals, hostels, residential aged care, prisons, mental health facilities, and refugee camps) who feel that they have been unfairly “*dispossessed*” in some way and so refuse to be incorporated into wholly optimistic systems of belief.

STEP FOURTEEN

Read Chs 4 to 7 where the first of Job’s comforters, Eliphaz, responds to his Lament and where Job replies.³⁸ Note in particular:

- There is heavy irony here. As we saw in STEP THREE, Eliphaz is clearly an Edomite name and probably means : *God is fine gold*. There are frequent references to the name *Eliphaz* (Genesis 36:4,10,11, 12, 15, & 16) as a son of *Esau*. There are also frequent references to *Teman* (Genesis 36:11, 15, 34, & 42) as a son of *Eliphaz* and as a clan name. The original readers of the Book of Job would have been outraged at the idea that a Edomite (a mortal enemy) could put himself in the position of offering to be a comforter of
- Job (remember that Job was dispossessed by Edomites) and that he would add insult to injury by schooling Job in how to remedy his present desperate situation. Remember too from STEP FOUR that the enmity between Israel and Edom went back to the lack of humanity shown by Edom to Israel during the Exodus. The original readers/hearers would have interpreted the opening six verses (particularly verse 6) as mocking in both tone and intent and would have been deeply suspicious as to where all this was leading.
- The word “schooling” or “instructed” in Job 4:3 means that Job was using sayings from the Wisdom tradition to aid others in their time of need. So now we have now seen Job presented first as priest whose prophylactic purification rites have been ineffective in

³⁸ By convention, biblical scholars refer to these three chapters as the first round of the First Cycle of Speeches. But as was shown in **STEP TEN**, this convention ignores the fact that there are seven (not just three) Cycles of Speeches within the overall structure of the Book of Job.

- forestalling calamity (STEP FIVE) then as a Prophet who feels betrayed by God (STEP THIRTEEN) and now as an exponent of the Wisdom tradition who (according to Eliphaz) cannot even apply his own advice to himself. The author(s) seem intent upon sandpapering the sensibilities of the original readers. This makes sense if the final form of the Book is given a provenance as late as the Seleucid period when King Antiochus Epiphanes was making a major assault on Jewish religion and culture.

To appreciate the rhetorical³⁹ method used by the author(s) of the Book of Job⁴⁰ it is worth putting in the effort to closely analyse where the words for Eliphaz's speech have been sourced and how they have been used.

- The author(s) have put the argument they want Eliphaz to make within a collage of allusions to other passages in the Hebrew Scriptures – sometimes they use the same words as verses in other Hebrew Scriptures; at other times they use words or metaphors that are somewhat similar, but easily recognisable.
- This method allows the author(s) to derive authority for their argument by establishing an association with those other revered texts, even though the context of those revered texts may be totally different. It also allows the author(s) to give us clues that there are a range of interpretations (literal and allegorical) to be got from their Book. Biblical scholars give a name to this particular method of “creating meaning”: “intertextuality”. (viz., evoking associations with other texts):
- In our predominantly “visual” (as opposed to aural) culture we no longer have the capacity to appreciate nuanced texts of this type but we pick up the same sort of thing immediately in TV shows or movies that set out to parody other TV shows or movie genres. Our modern antennae are just tuned differently – they are tuned for reception down at the visual end of the spectrum. This is a very useful mega-insight for pastoral carers. For example, if you quote the Bible, people will often say to you things like: “Don't throw the Bible at me!”. But if you use metaphors that are predominantly “visual” (e.g., “I can see you are a bit agitated”) then they seem to be able to relate to you much more comfortably.
- We are now going to spend some time compare verses to see how the Hebrew works:
 - All of Job 4& 5 and Psalms 32, 37; Sira⁴¹ 2 (or Ecclesiasticus 2)
 - Job 4:5 and Proverbs 24:10
 - Job 4:10 and Psalms 17:12; 22:13
 - Job 4:12-16 and 1Kings 11-13
 - Job 4:17 and Psalm 143:2
 - Job 5:4 and Psalm 127:3-5 and Proverbs 22:22
 - Job 5:6 and Genesis 3:17-19
 - Job 5:9 and Sira (or Ecclesiasticus)
 - Job 5:10 and Psalm 65:9&10
 - Job 5:11 and Psalm 75:7-8 and 1 Samuel 2&-8 (Hannah's Prayer)
 - Job 5:14 and Deuteronomy 28:29
 - Job 5:12 and Psalm 94:13
 - Job 5:16 and Psalm 107:41-42

³⁹ This term refers to the formal system of techniques developed by the Greeks for persuasive argument.

⁴⁰ The same method is common throughout the Hebrew Scriptures.

⁴¹ This Book is a fairly haphazard collection of maxims and forms part of the Old Greek Bible but does not appear in the Hebrew Scriptures canon. It too was probably written at the time of the Seleucid hellenisation of Palestine and the enforced adoption of Greek ways by Antiochus Epiphanes. It shares a lot with the Book of Job in its messages.

- Job 5:17 and Psalm 94:12; Proverbs 3:11-12; and Genesis 17:1b re use of epithet Shaddai. This passage starts the Covenant.
- Job 5:18 and Deuteronomy 32:39; and Hosea 6:1
- Job 5:19 and Proverbs 6:16-19
- Job 5:23 and 2 Kings 3:19,25; Isaiah 11=68; Hosea 2:20
- Job 5:25 and Deuteronomy 28:4,11
- Job 6:4 Psalm 38:2 and Psalm 88:16
- Job 6:9 and Numbers 11:15 and 1 Kings 19:4
- Job 6:10 and Leviticus 17:2 re decree and Isaiah 6:3g re use of the epithet Holy
- Job 6:15 and Jeremiah 15:18
- Job 6:19 and Isaiah 21:14 and 1 Kings 10:1a
- Job 6:22 and Jeremiah 15:10
- Job 6:24 and Leviticus 4; Numbers 15:22-29; and Psalm 19:11
- Job 7:1 and Sira 40:1
- Job 7:3 and Qo 1:13
- Job 7:4 and Deuteronomy 28:67
- Job 7:6 and Isaiah 38:12
- Job 7:7 and Psalm 89:47
- Job 7:9 and Wisdom 2:1,4
- Job 7:16 and Psalm 144:4
- Job 7:17 and Psalm 144:3 and Psalm 8:4
- Job 7:18 and Psalm 139

Skim through Chapters 8 to 14 where Bildad and Zophar in turn address Job; and where Job replies to each. Note in particular the graphic simile in Job 14:7-22 about Hope in resurrection after death.

STEP FIFTEEN

Skim through Chs 15 to 21 where Job's three comforters speak again and Job replies to each of them.⁴²

STEP SIXTEEN

Skim through Chs 22 to 27 (excluding Ch 28) where two of Job's comforters (not Zophar) speak a third time and Job replies to the two of them.⁴³

Read Ch 28 which biblical scholars refer to as the Hymn to Wisdom and note how it echoes similar Hymns in Sira 24; Proverbs (especially 1:20-33; 8; and 9:1-6); Baruch 3:9 to 4:4; and Wisdom 7:7 to 8:8.

Out of interest, read the Prologue to John's Gospel and see how it resonates with these Hymns about personified Wisdom.

⁴² By convention, biblical scholars refer to these chapters as the Second Cycle of Speeches.

⁴³ By convention, biblical scholars refer to these chapters as the Third Cycle of Speeches.

Read Ch 29-31 carefully because this is where Job summarises his case. Note in particular the following:

- Job lists seven reasons why he was respected in the eyes of others and deferred to:
 - He freed the poor in distress
 - Blessed the dying
 - Gave fair judgments
 - Assisted the disabled (was eyes for the blind and feet for the lame)
 - Was father to the poor
 - Heard the alien's case

 - Protected the weak from the wicked

- Job protests his innocence of ten sins:
 - No secret sins of the eyes (lust)
 - No sins of the lips (falsehood)
 - No seduction (adultery)
 - No infringement of the rights of slaves
 - No avoiding paying for land or produce used
 - Not insensitive to the needs and rights of the widows and orphans
 - Never gloated over his own wealth
 - No idolatry
 - No rejoicing over his enemy's misfortune
 - No avoiding hospitality to the stranger
- The form of his protestation of innocence is that of a conditional imprecatory oath of an accuser but here the oath is *against himself* as if he were an accuser at Law :
 - Exodus 22:6-10
 - Numbers 5:19-28
 - Judges 17:1-3
 - 1 Kings 8:31-32

Under this legal procedure, the accuser who lacks proof of a crime etc stands before the altar and calls down a curse on the accused. God shows the guilt or innocence of the accused by implementing or not implementing the curse invoked by the accuser.
- Job calls for either a list of charges (see Job 31:35 where he asks for his adversary to draft his writ against him) or a verdict.

STEP SEVENTEEN

Read Chs 32 to 37 where Elihu (a new character) adds to the argument, summarises what has been said, and then adjudicates the argument in favour of Job's comforters. Note in particular:

- Elihu means "He is my God"
- He obviously expected his turn to speak
- He is the only speaker to address Job by name
- He admonishes the others because they are non-plussed for an answer to Job and have given up the argument
- He claims he will use a different argument but doesn't really

- He claims that he is eager to speak with plenty to say, which he does in a very windy way
-

-
- He claims that will not take anyone's side but is very anti-Job and behaves as if he were the third speaker summing up for the opposition (which was Zophar's job).
- He lists seven reasons why Job is wrong in seeing God as treating him as an enemy and ignoring his cries for help:
 - God does not speak but communicates in different ways (dreams, nightmares, and sickness). Job should listen.
 - God is just and righteous and Job should repent.
 - Human behaviour does not affect God
 - God does listen but He does not answer the self-centered. Job does not fear God sufficiently.
 - Suffering can be sent by God to educate and instruct us.
 - God's wonders are the deeds of Creation which we all can see and respond to.
- We cannot call God to account. All we can do is fear Him. This is the beginning of Wisdom.

* Elihu then asks Job three questions. Now write them down succinctly in your own words.

STEP EIGHTEEN

Read Chs 38 to 41 where God replies to Job's challenge to show him what he has done to deserve such suffering. Note:

- God does not answer Job's challenge.
- God responds with a long list of counter-questions. Note the tone of God's response. How would you describe that tone?

STEP NINETEEN

Read Ch 42:1-6 where Job replies to God. Note exactly what Job says as to why he is withdrawing his charge.

STEP TWENTY

Now read Ch 42: 7-15 again and then reflect upon what you have learned from this Book.

Start by reading Annexure D again and then Wisdom 9:13-18 and ask yourself this question:

- is this passage from the Book of Wisdom a good summary of the message in the Book of Job?

SO WHAT DOES IT ALL MEAN?

There are seven layers of meaning in the Book of Job.

1. The “Problem of Evil”.

Theologians and philosophers talk about the “problem of evil”. This problem is best expressed as question : if God is so good why does He allow acute suffering in His world? Despite what is claimed in the preface to many of the theological commentaries on the Book of Job, the Book does not explain why there is suffering in the world. Job’s comforters proffer two explanations (you, Job, deserve to suffer because of your sins (whether deliberate or unintended) ; and your suffering is for your own good because it helps you grow spiritually). But God judges the comforters as not telling the *truth* about Him.

The two most important messages in the **Book of Job** are that our extreme suffering is a **mystery** beyond our comprehension and that **bad things** can and *do* happen to good people.

This news is not “good”. It is both unwelcome and cold comfort. To learn to accept one’s puny place in God’s cosmos (as opposed to our own person-centric concept of reality) is the spiritual journey that Job made; and as pastoral carers we can help others make the same journey when they are confronted with extreme loss and grief.

2. The Theological and the Human Virtues

There is a fundamental difference between the Theological and the Human Virtues. The difference revolves around *motivation*. One develops and displays the Human Virtues because it is one’s self-interest and self-preservation (and also my community’s interest) for me to do so. In other words one’s motivation is *utilitarian (i.e., to get some benefit in return)*. The motivation underlying the Theological Virtues is however quite different. In the Book of Job, God summaries the Theological Virtues as blamelessness, uprightness, fear of God, and shunning evil. These Theological Virtues are all about having a *right relationship* with God. One responds in these ways because one *acknowledges* the claims of God on oneself in this life. In times of crisis, one has, like Job, to plumb one’s spiritual resources in order to cope with loss and grief. In these circumstances, it is these Theological Virtues that count. One of the tasks of a pastoral carer is to explain all this to the person seeking care, particularly if they see themselves as virtuous (in the sense of displaying the Human Virtues) and their suffering as undeserved. Being close to God does not mean being free from pain or difficulties. God has only promised sufferers the serenity and fortitude to face up to them.

2. Doubting the presence and promises of God

What happens if one loses all confidence in the *truth* of existing beliefs? How does one actually live in spiritual peace (using Job’s metaphor, how does one counteract the chaos of an unrestrained Leviathan)? Job’s answer is that one must by an act of will reinstate oneself into the condition of firm belief. How many souls are troubled by doubt because God does not show Himself in the way they expected? One has to be attentive, because God shows himself in the way creation works and in the normal events of every day.

3. The Meaning of Suffering

Job twice had a premonition that things would go seriously wrong for him. Eventually God had to explain to Job that this undeserved suffering was in some way bound up with His (God's) mysterious purposes for creating the world. As pastoral carers we sometimes get the

opportunity to help care seekers see that they can sanctify their losses and grief as acts of atonement for the sins of the world. In other words, suffering – especially that suffering that seems unjust and out of all proportion - can have a redemptive meaning. In the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:5) Jesus (the) Christ proclaims as *blessed* (privileged, happy, lucky) those who mourn, viz., those who in this life carry a heavier cross: illness, handicap, physical pain, poverty, slander, injustice. Faith transforms the meaning of suffering. In everything, God works for good with those who love Him (Romans 5:28; 8:28), including everything that seems to us piercingly inexplicable or incomprehensible.

4. Spiritual Peace

The peace of our spirit (Shalom) does not depend upon the good nature and kindness of other people.

5. Being Comforters to Others

The sick and suffering merit a special attention in terms of one's company and one's interest in their circumstances. The best way to help them is to show them how to offer their loss and grief to God. The least helpful thing one can do for the sick and the suffering is to suggest that they are only getting what they deserve. True consolation is sharing someone's sorrows and encouraging them to recover their supernatural understanding of the loss and grief they are suffering. God's mercy is the essence of an eternal and gratuitous plan springing from His generosity.

6. Job's Tests are Allegories

Job's two tests or trials are allegories for two major loss and grief events in the life of Israel : the Exile to Babylon and the Seleucid "hellenisation" of Palestine. Both tests/trials were part of God's mysterious plan for the world. Both were a trial of the Theological Virtues of Israel. Israel passed both tests and recovered twofold what it had lost..

7. Encountering God

The *truth* about God cannot be encountered in Greek epistemology forms. The Hebrew language is the medium through which the *truth* about God can be encountered.

LIST OF PASTORAL THEMES

There are at least seven pastoral themes in the Book of Job:

1. What motivates mankind: is it just self-interest and self-preservation?
2. Bad things do happen to good people, e.g.,
 - a. The dispossession and extermination of indigenous peoples
 - b. Natural disasters
 - c. War
 - d. Disease and pestilence
 - e. Ill health
 - f. Loss of capacity to care for oneself
 - g. Mental health problems
 - h. Forced to be refugees
 - i. Loss of assets
3. The principle of Divine Retribution is false
4. How not to go about comforting those enduring loss and grief
5. Conversing with God
6. Hope in resurrection after death
7. Accepting loss and grief as part of the mystery of God's purposes

EXERCISE : ANALYSING THE BOOK OF JOB AS *VERBATIM* EXERCISE

You are now going to analyse Chapters 1 to 7 of the Book of Job as if it were a *Verbatim* exercise. Here is how I suggest you go about it:

Step 1 : Treat Chapters 1 & 2 as Preliminary Data to a pastoral visit by Eliphaz to Job. Just write down the basics of Job's position in life and the losses that he has experienced. (Do not include his immediate reaction to these losses or the exchange with his wife. Assume that Eliphaz would not have been aware of these.)

Step 2 : Put down in your own words the gist of Job's lament in Chapter 3 e.g.,

Job 1 – "I wish I were dead. In fact I wish I hadn't even been born. Why wasn't I stillborn? Look at me. Whatever I fear might happen, does happen. Things just get worse and worse. Why doesn't God just let me die?"

Step 3 : Put down in your own words the gist of Eliphaz's response to Job in Chapters 4 & 5 e.g.,

Eliphaz 2 – I hope you don't mind if I respond to what you just said. I feel that I have to say something. Look, you yourself were always the strong one holding up anybody enduring loss and grief. Get a grip on yourself. Now that it's happening to you, you are falling to pieces. Someone as pious and upright as you should take this a lot better and not lose hope. Etc. etc.

Step 4 : Put down in your own words the gist of Job's response to Eliphaz in Chapters 6 & 7.

Step 5 : Now write answers to each of these questions:

- has Eliphaz really understood Job is telling him? (*accurate empathic listening*)
- what is the major *theme* of Job's communication to Eliphaz?
- what *issues* (interpersonal etc.) does Job have?
- what *emotions* (fear, anger, disappointment, etc.) do you detect in what Job says?
- do Job's words "make sense" to you in terms of the theory that you have been taught about personal development and reactions to loss and grief? Explain.
- what is the *spiritual significance* in what Job is telling Eliphaz? (relationship with God etc.)
- what passages of Scripture come readily to your mind as you listen to Job?⁴⁴
- how would you have engaged with Job at a *spiritual* level?

⁴⁴ Making such associations is an important part of the pastoral carer's theological reflection on his/her encounters with others. **But this is not the sole value of Scripture as a resource. See p.7.**

ASSIGNMENT : A THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION UPON THE BOOK OF JOB

You are now required to write a *short essay* (1500 words maximum) on what you have gained from investing the time and effort to come to grips with the Book of Job. Please concentrate on how you intend to use these insights in your ministry.

Here are some questions that may give you a few ideas for tackling this essay:

1. Were you surprised at how sophisticated the Book of Job is?
2. Has this Book quickened your interest in studying other Books in the Hebrew Scripture canon?
3. Which of the THEMES listed on page 29 above have you already encountered in your pastoral care praxis?
4. Were there any passages in the Book of Job that particularly struck you as apposite to your own ministry?
5. What insights from studying this Book are you now going to take into your ministry?

Annexure B

PROCESS USED AND HERMENEUTICAL PRINCIPLES APPLIED IN COMPILING THIS READING AID

Process used:

- my text: the *Tenach* published by Mesorah (Scherman N. ed.)
- my literal translation into English: I produced my own literal translation of the first 6 Chapters to get a feel, first hand, for the style of the author(s) . I submitted my translation to Associate Professor Ed Conrad for correction. From Chapter 7 onwards I relied upon *The Interlinear Bible (Hebrew-Greek-English)* published by Sovereign Grace (Green J.P. ed).
- my preferred English translation: I compared all the translations in the 20 Commentaries, noting the differences and the resolution of difficult passages. My preferred English translations are the Jewish Study Bible and The New Jerusalem Bible.
- *Septuaginta*: I noted⁴⁵ with interest the differences and major elisions/omissions (the Old Greek text is about 100 lines or one sixth shorter) cited by Driver S.R. & Gray G.B.
- Nova Vulgata: I noted with interest the way difficult words and passages are handled in the Latin translation⁴⁶.
- Wisdom literature: I read all the background articles in the 20 Commentaries and consulted the available Encyclopedias.
- Secondary literature⁴⁷: I read ...books, book reviews, andjournal articles specifically on the Book of Job and anotherbooks andarticles on biblical interpretation issues relevant to the Book of Job.
- Pastoral Care: I read aboutbooks on pastoral care.
- Tutorials: I used the notes from my tutorials for introducing trainee pastoral carers to the Book of Job and I reviewed the student's assignments and their course evaluations.

⁴⁵ I have done a Certificate level course in New Testament Greek.

⁴⁶ I have done a double major in Latin.

⁴⁷ See the Bibliography for the books and academic journals that were consulted in writing this reading aid.

Here are the seven hermeneutical *principles*⁴⁸ I applied in compiling this reading aid:

- Proposition 1: *Competence in socio-historical and linguistic analyses, and the ability to appreciate literary devices and to understand the nature of reader-response processes are all essential capabilities for producing a rounded interpretation of a biblical text in context.*
 - Biblical scholars have a long tradition of seeing the author-centred (sometimes labelled “what is behind the text”), text-centred (sometimes labelled “what is within the text”), and reader-centred (sometimes labelled “what is in front of the text”) hermeneutical methodologies as in competition for legitimacy. However, biblical interpretation benefits from trying to apply as broad a range of the 14 or so hermeneutical methodologies⁴⁹ *as practicable* to individual texts.
- Proposition 2 : *There are no logically defensible grounds for dismissing (or prioritising) a particular hermeneutical methodology on a priori grounds.*
 - What we are trying to do with the individual texts will determine the relevance and degree of importance of the 14 or so hermeneutical methodologies to the task at hand.
- Proposition 3: *Form follows function. It is safe to assume that all texts in the Hebrew Scripture canon have a serious theological function (purpose).⁵⁰ The author(s)’ purpose has to be discerned (however speculative our interpretation necessarily has to be). If we don’t first attempt to discern the Function (purpose) of the text we can ask the wrong questions of the text.*
 - To search the Book of Job for the “theological meaning” of *why* good people suffer is a different endeavour to that of using the Book of Job to help you minister to those enduring loss and grief. One is more an exercise in metaphysical logic; the other is a more psychological enquiry.
 - Despite Job’s demands to know what he has done to deserve his losses and his present state, the Book of Job demonstrably does not answer the question as to *why* good people suffer losses and endure grief because that is not the author(s)’ purpose. That is a wrong question to put to the text. The author(s)’ purpose seems to be profoundly sceptical, viz., questioning the traditional “meaning making” inherent in the Hebrew Scriptures:
 - the view of the Prophets that Israel *deserved* its fate.

⁴⁸ See the Handbook for a summary of the 20 hermeneutical principles that the Roman Catholic Church has endorsed for theological enquiry of the Scriptures. The Handbook also includes a similar set of hermeneutical principles recommended by a leading Protestant theologian.

⁴⁹ See the Handbook No 3 on Reading the Hebrew Scriptures for Pastoral Care or a description of the various hermeneutical methodologies and for a discussion of which ones seem more relevant to the needs of pastoral carers.

⁵⁰ Even *The Song of Songs*, which is undoubtedly the most problematic Book in the Hebrew Scripture canon, can be shown to have a serious theological purpose even though there is no mention of the word God in the Book. See the debate in the Journal series titled *Interpretation* Vol. 59 No. 3 July 2005 as to whether *The Song of Songs* has a theological purpose and what that purpose might be.

- the message of the Wisdom tradition that good living brings its own reward.
- the underlying theme of Genesis (and other Books of Torah) that mankind (and especially Israel) has a special relationship with God.

These challenges to the traditional forms of “meaning making” in the Hebrew Scriptures plus Job’s extensive diatribes about divine absence, lack of hope in resurrection after death, and lack of hope in divine justice lend a

decidedly tragic dimension to the Book which the “happy ending” does nothing to ameliorate. The *theological purpose* of the Book of Job is to point out the tragedy that lies in the lot of humankind – doomed to exist on earth without being able to comprehend the purposes of God: either His benevolence or His allowing bad things to happen to good people. For

mankind, humble acceptance of the inscrutable will of God is the only path to transcendence.

- Proposition 4 : *Form is the author(s)’ communication strategy and entails choices about which genre, structure, and literary devices to use to convey his/her message.*
- Proposition 5 : *The Medium (Form) is not the Message. The message is the content of the communication.*
- Proposition 6 : *It is the overall Composition (Function, Form, and Content) that provides the author(s) with the leverage for communicating what the reader is meant to understand.*
 - However, we have to be alert to the fact that our postmodern logical-rational mindsets can work against our fully appreciating the author(s)’ intent in particular Hebrew Scriptures. We postmodernists are programmed to resolve the intended meaning of a biblical text quickly and confidently, particularly if we are searching for the “theological meaning” as to why good people undergoing extreme suffering. We postmodernists have little sympathy for texts like the Book of Job that oblige us to fill in gaps in sense and to dis-ambiguate passages pregnant with many sometimes competing meanings. The Book of Job uses “intertextuality” (echoing other biblical texts) in a subversive way, sometimes by ironic reversal of the meaning of the referent text. It has a serious theological purpose but it makes its point by undermining the Greek method of logical exposition and by substituting instead, intense feeling aroused by incomprehensible loss and grief.
- Proposition 7 : *The Hebrew Scriptures, both as canon and as individual texts, have an inexhaustible complexity that tugs at us spiritually.*
 - Great composition compel us to keep looking for layers of meaning. Once we have been led through it by a tutor, a complex work like the Book of Job does not allow us to “consume” it immediately, tire of it, or dismiss it. Instead it

- retains a compelling sense of mystery. It remains dynamic. Each time we read it we see more and more.
- Very sophisticated productions like the Book of Job can have a particularly strong spiritual attraction because they deal with the meaning of “meaning making” itself (viz., the task of trying to understand the nature and purpose of our existence in the world about us).

Annexure C

DATING THE BOOK OF JOB

Here are my reasons for dating the Book of Job⁵¹ to a period no earlier than the Exile :

- No biblical scholar has ever claimed to be able to confidently date the Book of Job. Suggestions for its provenance range from the 10th to the 2nd century BC with most favouring a period from the mid-6th century to the mid-4th century BC.
- The Book of Job is not mentioned explicitly in any other texts of the Hebrew Scripture canon; nor is there any story similar to Job's.
- The name Job is mentioned only once in the Hebrew Scripture canon: Ezekiel 14:12-20; and that Book is given a late provenance (post 585BC). It also appears⁵² to have been mentioned in the Hebrew/Aramaic (but not the Old Greek) version of the Book of Tobit (Ch 2:12) which, too, is accepted as post-Exilic
- Many biblical scholars :
 - agree that the Book of Job is *dependent* upon the texts it echoes (rather than vice versa)
 - assess its provenance as more likely to be post the Babylonian Exile than earlier
 - view the 100 or so *hapax legomena* (i.e., words used once only) and the rare words as supporting a late provenance.
 - note the high incidence of Aramaisms and Arabic words which also supports a late provenance.
 - assess the sophisticated language, grammar, imagery, and poetical devices as confirming a late provenance.
 - note that the conceptualisation of the theology is late and see this as supporting a late provenance.
- As I demonstrate in Annexure D, there is a very close correspondence in subject matter and structure between the Book of Job and the Book of Malachi (which is dated to the late Exile or post-Exile period).
 - It would be very difficult to argue that the Book of Job and the Book of Malachi are not closely related.
 - Equally, it would be difficult to support a claim that the Book of Malachi is *dependent* upon the far more sophisticated Book of Job rather than vice versa.
- Anti-Edomite feeling is a characteristic of Books of the Exile and post-Exile period.

⁵¹ In the forms that have down to us.

⁵² Via inclusion of a reference to Job in later translations of these work(s).

My reasons for giving the Book of Job⁵³ a provenance in the Seleucid period are:

- The period 200-100BC was particularly traumatic for Israel and thus very fertile for production of biblical literature:
 - Second Book of Maccabees (124 BC - final version)
 - Book of Daniel (167-164BC)
 - Book of Ecclesiasticus (c.160BC)
- The Aramaic Targum of Job found at Qumran (11QtgJob) has been dated to the second century BC (i.e., 100-200BC) on linguistic grounds. It generally agrees with the Masoretic Text version but sometimes is closer to the Old Greek translation (which is accepted as being in circulation before 100BC).
- There is a possible reference to The Book of Job in The Book of Ecclesiasticus or Si or Sirach or Ben Sira (assumed to have been written around 160BC)
- The Book of Job evokes many verses from the TORAH and the PROPHETS, and Hope/Lack of Hope are dominant themes, but the Book is unusual in these respects :
 - There is no reference to Elijah or use of language common to messianic liberation. I am presuming that this form of liberation is no longer relevant.
 - There is no expression of hope in restoration of appropriate worship in a future Third temple. I am presuming that this expectation is no longer relevant.
 - At the end of the Book of Job, Eliphaz (the Edomite) and the other comforters avoid God's wrath by obeying His instruction to go to Job (in his priestly role) with a sin offering for holocaust and to have Job intercede for them.
 - This instruction is not presented as an oracle but as an event that happened.
 - i. The same strong language is used as in the Book of Malachi (God expresses His anger towards Eliphaz (the Edomite) and his companions for not telling the *truth* about Him).
 - ii. The outcome is the same as that promised in the Book of Malachi (viz., vindication).
- As I demonstrate in Annexure D, there are sufficient clues in the Book of Job for readers/hearers to see that:
 - Job is not just as a person but also as an allegory for Israel.
 - Job's two tests should also be read allegorically as trials actually undergone by Israel (i.e., not read as oracles).
 - the Book is very skeptical and, largely by the use of irony, it challenges all three of traditional "meaning making" conceptualizations of Israel (Covenant, Prophecy, and Wisdom) and comes to the conclusion that what happened to Job (Israel) is a mystery and beyond man's understanding.
 - the structure of the Book parodies the efficacy of the Greek style of formal argumentative process
 - as Israel's experience of the Babylonian Exile and the Seleucid "hellenisation" of Palestine,
- In Annexure D, I conclude that, if Job's two tests are to be read allegorically, then it is necessary to find two candidate events that were traumatic enough to call into question all previous "meaning making" about Israel being God's *chosen people* and call for answers as to what happened and why.
 - The most likely candidates are:
 - first the Babylonian Exile; and
 - second, the far more serious, "near death" experience of the Seleucid King Antiochus Epiphanes' assault on Jewish religion and culture.

⁵³ In the forms that have come down to us.

Annexure D

THE BOOK OF JOB AND COSMIC DUALISM

All biblical scholars are puzzled by the unique structure of the Book and have difficulty in extracting determinate (i.e., self-evidently coherent or easily derived) meaning from the Book.

- Most biblical scholars thus offer solutions for reassembling the text into more meaningful blocks.
- They also view many verses (and part verses) as unintelligible and thus treat them as corrupted in transmission.
- As can be seen from the example in the Attachment to this Annexure, even some key verses lend themselves to a wide variety of interpretation that can change the whole meaning of the stanza (or in the case of this particular verse, the message of the whole Book).

I don't share the view that the Book needs radical surgery because I think that it *can* be translated to "makes sense" *in its current form* if the translator adopts the hermeneutical principles outlined in Annexure B. Briefly, this means accepting:

- that the Book has a serious *theological purpose*
- that purpose of the Book is to canvas these sorts of questions: what is required to attain a "right relationship" with God? Does Job (an allegory for Israel) have this right relationship with God? Is operation of the Principle of Divine Retribution the correct way of describing the right relationship with God and of interpreting and His will/purpose in connection with suffering?
- that the old adage: *Form follows Function* applies
- that *intertextuality* is important to translating the Book because much of the content of the *message* of the Book lies within the collage of allusions to other passages in the Hebrew Scriptures – sometimes via verses that use the same words or metaphors as verses in other Hebrew Scriptures; at other times via verses that use words or metaphors that are somewhat similar, but easily recognisable.
- that irony is an important literary devices in the Book⁵⁴
- that the *structure* of the Book is itself a means of communication. It works:
 - partly by *Intertextuality* (viz., by evoking the first creation story in the Book of Genesis, the patriarchal stories in the Book of Genesis, and the Book of Malachi); and
 - partly by the "abrupt juxtaposition of two very different ways⁵⁵ of telling the story of Job Recognition that the book is at odds with itself is key to its meaning and purpose.... Two very different prose and poetic voices, two very different ways of telling the same story that cannot be harmonised into a single perspective. The dialogic relationship is enhanced , however by having one way of telling the story interrupt the other, as happens in the Book of Job. ”⁵⁶ For simplicity I call this *Dualism*.

These two features (**Intertextuality** and *Dualism*) are discussed in detail below.

⁵⁴ As shown in the examples highlighted in the reading aid.

⁵⁵ Biblical scholars usually differentiate the two by saying one is prose and the other is poetry.

⁵⁶ Newsom C.A., *The Book of Job*, New Interpreter's Bible Volume 4, Nashville. Abingdon Press (1996) p323

Intertextuality with the Patriarchal stories in the Book of Genesis

The front and rear sections of the Book of Job (Job Chs 1-2 and Job Ch 42:7-17) are usually referred to by biblical scholars as the Prologue and Epilogue. In terms of linkage to a genealogy, third person authorial stance, tone, content, language, grammar, and narrative structure, these parts of the Book evoke the patriarchal stories in the Book of Genesis⁵⁷. It also has the same message : men who adhere to the Theological Virtues (fear of God, uprightness, shunning evil, blamelessness) in adversity will have an on-going close relationship with God and earn social respect, gain material rewards, and sire dynasties.

Intertextuality with the first Creation story in the Book of Genesis

There are dozens of verses in the Book of Job that evoke the first Creation story in the Book of Genesis. The major references⁵⁸ occur in:

- Job's lament (Ch 3) where he wishes that he had never been born and expresses this in language that seeks to have the Creation reversed;
- Elihu's speech Ch 36:22-33 & Ch 37 where he cites Creation as proof to humans of God's existence, His omnipotence, and His good will to humankind and animals; and
- God's reply to Job (Chs 38 to 41) where He challenges Job to match his act of Creation or even comprehend its purpose.

Intertextuality with the Book of Malachi

The Book of Job and the Book of Malachi (thought to have been written around 500BC) have many similarities⁵⁹:

- Literary structure
 - both Books have the hallmarks of a carefully wrought literary product but the Book of Job is far more sophisticated
 - Malachi also has the form of a Hellenist diatribe or verbal interchange with interlocutors but in a much reduced form (i.e., only one round of three speeches)
 - In both Books there is an "envelope" around the exchange of interlocutors
 - In both Books the verbal exchange is stylized and didactic
 - In both Books the drama is a form of court case
 - In both Books there is an attempt to demonstrate how one party appears from both the hearer's and from God's perspective
- .similar messages
 - In both Books there is an obvious lack of blessings despite the endeavours to fulfill religious duties
 - In both Books the cause of the present lack of blessing is put down to behaviour (of Job on one hand and the priests in Malachi on the other)
 - In both Books there is a lack of comprehension of the accusations and a general sense of injustice directed towards God
 - Both Job and the priests in Malachi question whether God loves them
 - Instead of being a surety of God's love, the messages of Psalms and Prophets are made to sound full of irony

⁵⁷ See STEPS 2-9 and STEP 11 in the reading aid for the cross references.

⁵⁸ These sections of the Book are studied closely in the reading aid.

⁵⁹ This analysis was prompted by a reference to Job in Tiemeyer L-S.'s recent article titled "Giving Voice to Malachi's Interlocutors" in the Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament Vol. 19 No.2 (2005) at pp173-192.

- Whether Job or the priests have been guilty of despising God's name consciously or unconsciously is a major issue in the debate
- Job and the priests in Malachi are ignorant of having committed any offence against God and call for proof
- In both Books the interlocutor(s) are deeply skeptical of any change in Job or the priests in Malachi
- In both Books the interlocutor(s) taunt Job and the priests in Malachi as to whether God would listen to their pleas until they repent of their sin
- In both Books doubt is expressed about God's ability to keep Israel (as does Joel 2,17; 2 Kings 2,4; Psalm 115:2; Psalm 79:10; and Micah 7:10)
- In both Books there is concern about a seemingly absent God (Psalm 89:50 and Psalm 42:4,11)
- Both Books articulate the Principles of Divine Retribution and vindication of the righteous and indicate that one side's incomprehension of their suffering is matched by the other side's conviction that their suffering is just. Both Books also question the operation of these Principles in life.
- Both Books share an expression of theodicy (Micah...; Hab1:13; Psalm 73; Job 21:7-25; Psalm 37; Psalm 22:1; Psalm 89:49 and Qbh 9:2-3)
- In both Books the questions are not directly answered and are met with counter-questions
- In both Books another party is later introduced into the exchange
- In both Books there is a close rendering of passages from the Book of Proverbs on common themes in Wisdom literature (good fortune, long life, and God's favour).
- Both Books end not with a working through of the doctrine of retribution but with a surprising twist: mercy and theophany take place.
- In neither Book does God punish someone for questioning Him. But He does show his irritation.

Despite all these similarities, the Book of Job is a far more sophisticated production than the Book of Malachi in the following respects:

- Scale
- Structure
- messages
- language
- imagery

The Book of Malachi deals with the credibility problems caused by non-delivery of the promises in Isaiah 56-66, Ezekiel, Haggai and Zechariah. The issue is: whose fault is it? The Book of Job, on the other hand, deals more generically and more systematically with the credibility problems caused by failure of the three traditional forms of meaning-making in the Hebrew Scriptures:

- the view of the Prophets that Israel *deserved* its fate
- the message of the Wisdom tradition that good living brings its own reward
- the underlying theme of Genesis (and other Books of Torah) that mankind (and especially Israel) has a special relationship with God enshrined in the Covenant.

The issue is : what do we do now?

These challenges to the traditional forms of "meaning making" in the Hebrew Scriptures plus Job's extensive diatribes about divine absence, lack of hope in resurrection after death, and lack of hope in divine justice lend a decidedly tragic dimension to the Book which the

“happy ending” does nothing to ameliorate. The tragedy lies in the lot of humankind – doomed to exist on earth without being able to comprehend the purposes of God: either His benevolence or His allowing bad things to happen to good people. The one line message of the Book of Job for mankind generally is: humble acceptance of the inscrutable will of God is the only path to transcendence. This broader focus is a big jump in sophistication, theology, and vision from that of the Book of Malachi.

This would certainly explain its authentic feel as an expression of major loss and grief. It would also account for why the highly skeptical Book of Job was treasured within the Hebrew Scripture canon.

Dualism in the Book of Job

Dualism is a subtle concept that can be discerned throughout both the Hebrew Scriptures and the Good News of Jesus (the Christ) and is best explained as having two dimensions as follows:

- the ***cosmic dualism*** of the Book of Genesis & eschatological literature generally: on one hand there is a sovereign Lord of Creation but on the other there is a world trapped by forces opposing the divine way (but the latter forces are finally to be overcome usually via a promised catalytic messianic figure). The opposing forces don't simply coexist; they are locked in conflict.
- the ***temporal dualism*** described in the Prophetic Books: a present evil age remedied by the rule of God in an age to come when humankind (especially the king and/or the priesthood) live out the Theological Virtues (sometimes a catalytic messianic figure is foretold/promised)

The ***cosmic dualism*** is normally communicated via stories or metaphors that use one or more of the following contrasts for dramatic effect:

- God and (the) Satan
- heaven & earth (above & below)
- light & darkness
- life and death
- spirit & flesh
- ***truth*** and falsehood
- divine & human understanding (wisdom)

The Book of Job canvasses all seven⁶⁰ of these contrasts; but the one that appears to dominate is the ***truth*** v. falsehood contrast, with God eventually adjudicating in Job's favour (see Job 42:7).

The Book of Job begins to make a lot of sense once one sees that:

- its meta-theme is ***cosmic dualism***;
- its structure is organised around the abovelisted ***seven*** contrasts; and
- the number 7 has been used as an organizing feature.

⁶⁰ See pages 17 & 18 of the reading aid where I list the more obvious examples where the number 7 has been used as an organising feature of the Book of Job. Interestingly, the Prologue to John's Gospel uses all seven too and modern Commentaries emphasize the many parallels in that Gospel to the Hebrew Scriptures.

However the structure of Book is itself a symbol of this meta-theme because it contrasts the ways of attaining divine understanding (about *truth*) with the methods (rhetorical strategies) that human beings use to gain understanding (*truth*). The result is a very complex literary work.

Many biblical scholars have intuited that the fractured structure of the Book of Job is deliberate and that it “seems to work against itself”⁶¹. Not only does the Book canvass all seven of the contrasts that characterize *cosmic dualism*, it also deploys three rhetorical strategies to weave them together but fractures them via a strategy of interruption and juxtaposition. Here is how it is done:

- Firstly, the Book presents us with the rhetorical strategy of a patriarchal story (that starts with a clear link to a genealogy – in this case the Edomite/Horite genealogies in Genesis Ch 36)⁶².
 - But, as many biblical scholars have pointed out, the patriarchal story is ***not in*** the Book of Genesis ***within the TORAH*** where you would expect to find it. It has in effect been ripped out and a clear hole left in Genesis where one would expect a patriarchal story to follow the genealogy. Presumably this hole in Genesis was deliberate and had its origins in anti-Edomite feeling.⁶³
 - The patriarchal story is itself fractured by Job’s lament and the three rounds of speeches that this lament provokes from Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar plus Job’s replies to them plus Elihu’s speech plus God’s reply to Job plus Job’s response and then God’s adjudication on who was telling the *truth*.
 - The end result is that the patriarchal story is difficult to piece together and would presumably comprise Chs 1, 2:1-10, and 42:12-16. The simple message of the patriarchal story is that attaining divine understanding means having a right relationship with God (viz., practising the Theological Virtues) and humbly accepting God’s will (whatever calamities come along). Whether this will bring its own reward is the very proposition that the Satan contests and puts to the test.
 - The various interruptions of other parties (Job’s wife, Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar, and Elihu) using the methods for attaining human understanding almost obscure the *truth*. Accessing the *truth* is always a battle of understandings (divine v. human) – an ongoing *cosmic dualism*.
- Secondly, the Book presents us with a type of legal proceeding that Job launches against God seeking His appearance to justify what he (Job) has done wrong that warrants his present suffering.
 - But Job later complicates this legal proceeding against God by seeking God’s judgment against Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar for maligning him. Job eventually withdraws his proceeding against God. The whole episode is a shambles.
 - God does not answer charges. Therefore, the legal proceeding, as a method of attaining human understanding, has no efficacy as a way of attaining divine understanding.
- Thirdly, the Book presents us with the rhetorical strategy of a formal argumentative process in the Greek style.
 - The Greeks were particularly fond of this argumentative process and it continued to be used until the end of the Medieval period. (It survives in a condensed form in school and University debating contests and in some of the more adversarial Ph.D. assessment processes). In this type of argumentative process Person A states a proposition and Person B raises objections to it. Person A then responds to Person
 -

⁶¹ Op. cit. Newsom C.A. (1996) pp320-325 for an overview.

⁶² See STEPS 2,3,& 4 in the reading aid for the detail.

⁶³ The depth of this feeling is explained in STEP 4 of the reading aid.

- B. Person C then raises objections and Person A responds to Person C. Person D then raises objections and Person A replies to Person D. This goes on for three cycles and Person A then summarises their case and a neutral party then adjudicates.
- The speeches are longwinded and the content otiose. The process finally fizzles out with Zophar not even participating in the final cycle of the argument. The opposition withdraws.
- A totally new character (Elihu) is inserted to do the summing up of both sides but he shows himself to be prejudiced against Job.
- When Chs 4 to 37 are read as a parody of the efficacy of this style of formal argumentative process in coming to grips with the *truth* about anything serious like a *divine* understanding of the reasons for Job's predicament.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ St. Paul voices the same conclusion after his encounter with Greek debaters. This is yet another instance where St. Paul appears to show the influence of the Book of Job on his thinking.

Attachment

Job 42:6 is a key verse in the Book because it expresses Job's disposition following his direct encounter with God. Newsom C.A. in her article *Considering Job* in the Journal *Currents in Research* 1 (1993) p111 lists a sample of interpretations (to which I have added a few):

1. "Therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes." (NRSV)
2. "I retract what I have said, and repent in dust and ashes." (TNJB)
3. "Therefore I recant and relent, being dust and ashes." (NJPSV)
4. "Therefore I recant and repent, a child of dust and ashes." (Wolvers 1990)
5. "Therefore I retract and repent of dust and ashes." (Habel 1985)
6. "Therefore I despise and repent of dust and ashes." (Good 1990)
7. "Therefore I recant and change my mind concerning dust and ashes." (Janzen)
8. "I reject and am comforted over dust and ashes." (Perdue 1991)

