Q20

Twenty Questions Asked, but Not Necessarily Answered, in the Bible

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Preface

Why Questions?

I have spent much of my life asking questions. And answering them. Or at least trying to.

For decades I've taught the Bible, spoken with people about Yeshua the Messiah, and listened to people wrestle with matters of faith, doubt, suffering, identity and the meaning of life. Some questions have been asked so often that I can almost anticipate them before the person finishes speaking. Others have surprised me. A few have stopped me in my tracks and made me reconsider something I thought I understood.

And some have never received a satisfactory answer.

That's all right with me.

I've come to believe that a good question can be just as valuable as a good answer. Sometimes more valuable. An answer may settle an issue, but a question can open a door. It can challenge an assumption, expose a contradiction, invite reflection or lead us into a conversation we didn't know we needed to have.

The Bible is full of such questions.

Some are asked by God. Others come from prophets, kings, disciples, enemies, doubters and ordinary people trying to make sense of extraordinary circumstances. Yeshua Himself frequently responded to questions by asking another one. He seemed remarkably comfortable making people think rather than simply telling them what to think.

As a Jewish man, I find that particularly appealing.

Jewish learning has a long tradition of questioning, discussing, debating and occasionally disagreeing. Around a table, in a classroom or over an open Bible, a question is not necessarily a sign of unbelief. It may be evidence that someone is paying attention. I grew up in a world where questions were part of the conversation, and my faith in Yeshua has not diminished my appreciation for them.

Quite the opposite.

But this book isn't a collection of twenty questions I've asked God. It's a collection of twenty questions found in the Scriptures themselves. Some are directed toward God. Some are directed toward other people. Some are asked by Yeshua. And some, although spoken thousands of years ago, seem to have been waiting for us.

Consider the first question in our collection. God asks Adam, “Where are you?” Surely God knows where Adam is. The question isn't a request for information. It's an invitation for Adam to recognise where he has ended up. And when I read that question today, I cannot help hearing it addressed to me.

Bob, where are you?

Not where were you when you first believed. Not where were you during your most productive years. Not where do people think you are. Where are you now?

That's the remarkable thing about biblical questions. They refuse to remain safely confined to ancient history.

Twenty questions are hardly enough to explore the subject. In fact, choosing only twenty has been one of the difficulties of writing this book. There are hundreds more. Perhaps thousands, depending on how we count them. Some are profound. Some are uncomfortable. Some are almost humorous. Some are heartbreaking. Others seem ordinary until we stop and consider what is really being asked.

Nor have I chosen these twenty because I believe I can answer them all.

The subtitle is deliberate: Twenty Questions Asked, but Not Necessarily Answered, in the Bible. Sometimes Scripture gives an answer. Sometimes it gives several. Sometimes the answer is different from what the questioner expected. And sometimes the question remains, inviting us to keep thinking, praying and listening.

I've tried to approach each question by considering its original setting. Who asked it? To whom? What was happening? Why did the question matter then? And what might it mean for us now? Along the way, I've offered some reflections from my own life and years of studying the Scriptures. I've also included possible takeaways and prayers, not because every question can be neatly resolved, but because questions ought to affect the way we live.

You don't have to agree with every conclusion I reach. In fact, I hope you'll occasionally disagree enough to return to the biblical text and examine it for yourself. That's a far better outcome than simply accepting my interpretation because my name happens to be on the cover.

I would encourage you to read the Scripture passages surrounding each question, not merely the isolated verse. Context matters. The Bible was not written as a collection of inspirational quotations. These questions arise from real conversations, conflicts, hopes, disappointments and encounters with the living God.

You might read one chapter each day, or take longer. Some questions may deserve a second reading. Others may lead you into conversations with friends, family or fellow students of Scripture. I hope they do.

Above all, don't rush to the answer.

Allow the question to do its work.

There is something wonderfully unsettling about discovering that while we have been asking questions of the Bible, the Bible has been asking questions of us. We come to Scripture looking for information and sometimes find ourselves confronted with an invitation, a challenge or a summons to change.

Perhaps that's one reason God asks questions even when He already knows the answers.

So welcome to Q20. Twenty questions from the Bible, explored by one Jewish follower of Yeshua who is still learning, still wondering and still asking.

Let's begin with the first question God asks humanity.

“Where are you?”

Bob Mendelsohn

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