

Monday Evening Bible Reading Group: October 2024: Some Notes

October 7th: Ecclesiasticus 34: 1-17: Host Toyin, Lead Brian. Worthlessness of dreams. The author's experience. The security of those who fear God. Verse 6! How do you distinguish the God Visions featured in the Bible from idle dreams? People were vulnerable to the machinations of self-styled "diviners". (We still have fortune tellers etc all over the country – including some whose performances are sometimes cancelled due to unforeseen circumstances.) West Croydon recently had a display stand proclaiming Jesus was the child of the devil! Person of vision = Good; Dreamer = Bad? Tread gently on people's dreams is generally good advice re dealing with the dreams of others. For ourselves, we maybe need to use the reality check. Keep in mind Martin Luther King: "I have a dream"....which went with action to fulfil the dream.

On the whole, my dreams have not helped me one little bit. Whereas ideas "out of the blue" have. Dream ain't vision! In Bible terms, we think of Daniel and Revelation as dreams, but maybe these are more a coded way of telling truth...plus a bit of speculation. I think Vision tends to mean big stuff, whereas Dreams are smaller and bitty?

The author's note stresses the importance of learning from (good or bad) experience.

The last section reminds us of the God is our Stronghold theme. That message doesn't mean that things are always cushy for the believer. Think of the story of The Three Children: willing to believe God would rescue them, but determined to do the God thing even if they had to go through a painful death. The numerous Christian martyrs are evidence that God being there for us does not mean things are going to be easy!

October 14th: Ecclesiasticus 34:18 – 35:20: Host Andy, Lead Evan. Good and bad sacrifices. God's mercy for the oppressed. Formal observance is not sufficient. There must be real religion: meant and lived. The show is just show and does nothing for God or for us. Steal the widow's pension and put it in the collection plate, and God is really not impressed. Say sorry for doing the wrong thing before embarking on doing it again, and you are not credible. Richard III was portrayed at doing murders, then crossing himself – not to be commended. Keeping the law is a good thing because this reinforces good relationships: it is the relationships (with God and with each other) that matter. Grudging obedience is not good, but obedience is better than disobedience!

Widows and orphans are the classical examples of vulnerable people. God does look after them, but usually through us! We can't just recognise the needs, and leave it to God to meet those needs in some undefined way.

October 21st: Ecclesiasticus 36: 1-20: Host Andy, Lead Peta. Prayer for Israel's deliverance. Careful discrimination. Keep verse 4 in mind: God's favour does in a sense come with a price. Verse 11 makes me think of Gaza and the West Bank: the message heard by some Jews that God gifted all this territory to Jews (and only Jews). Isn't God

everybody's God??? Nationalism and religion do often run together, e.g. in modern Russia; but they are uneasy partners. We have talked before about "God who made thee mighty, make thee mightier yet", and about "I vow to thee my country".

Discrimination is an interesting word: discriminating is good; discriminating against is not good. How do we get this right?

October 28th: Ecclesiasticus 36: 21 – 37: 31: Host Andy, Lead Miranda. Wives. Friends. Counsellors. Teachers. Discrimination. 36:21 is rather weird: apparently men are expected to be fussy in choosing a woman, while women just take what they are given! At least a woman's beauty is not all that matters...though only the tongue is also highly rated, apparently not the brain. This isn't quite at the Taliban level, but it is rather one-sided. The role of the woman as home-maker and home-guardian leads to the rather intriguing notion that the single man is homeless...and therefore suspect. At this time, the would-be husband paid the bride's family: in effect buying his wife.

The notion of some friends being friends in name only still rings true. Maybe a lot of "on-line" friends are in this category; though that is not to say that on-line contacts are necessarily a bad thing. Just don't expect too much from the relationship? I like 36.6: Don't abandon your friends just because you don't currently NEED them.

Choose who you seek advice from; and don't overlook the possibility of advice being self-interested... though don't become neurotically suspicious. Take advice into account, rather than blindly following it. Expert advice has of course to be taken very seriously. 37.16 says always consult first – maybe that should be subject to "when you can", e.g. not rushing into a too good to be true investment.

Respect teachers/preachers who practice what they teach/preach. I'm not sure about the advice to select the popular teacher: being in with the mob is not always a good sign. How far is wisdom the same thing as common sense? Avoid gluttony....and not just too much food, too much of a lot of other things too.