

## **Monday Evening Bible Reading Group: Monday 7 November: Jeremiah 16 & 17**

**Themes:** Very much a plurality of content. False gods again. A strong passage on Sabbath observance, or rather condemnation of non-observance. The chosen instrument of punishment is polytheistic and had no concept of the Sabbath! Jeremiah is denied the norms of social intercourse and family life: a costly vocation. There is a way back, despite everything. The uniqueness of the real God: I AM (WILL BE).

**Quotations:** “An epidemic of death” (16.3) “I’ve quit caring about what happens to this people” ((16.5) “I’m about to banish smiles and laughter” ((16.9) “He’s like a tumbleweed on the prairie.” (17.6)

**Clarifications:** Sabbath loomed larger with the loss of Temple and Temple rituals as an identifier of Jewishness and a focus of faith. Sabbath observance was NOT easy in an agricultural context: hard to ignore livestock on Saturday, for example. Interesting that people are asked to refrain from some mourning customs (cutting and shaving) which were banned by Deuteronomy and Leviticus! 17: 5-8 is very close to Psalm 1 – not the only example of echoes of this sort. Hebrews associated body organs with particular “feelings”: heart with reason, kidneys with emotions. 19-27 seems to be an insertion. Asherah poles were symbols of the goddess Asherah.

**Questions:** Do we make God in our own image: unable to imagine God other than in human form, and projecting onto God our own best or worst? (God must get angry, because I get angry. God must be jealous, because I get jealous.) How do we keep our Sabbath.... if we do? How do you rate the advice to live each day as if it were our last day? (Dietrich Bonhoeffer took this line in his Nazi prison cell – where potential last day was very real!) Can we acknowledge responsibility for our sins, while recognising that some of those we want to criticise maybe behaved as they did because of circumstances or inheritance? If I were Putin, would I be behaving differently? Is there such a thing as habitual sin: what might have seemed wrong once has just become what I do? Could we retain the hope that Jeremiah retained in his circumstances; or are we fair weather Christian optimists?