

Monday Evening Bible Reading Group: January 23rd: Jeremiah Chapter 27

Themes: Collaboration = Good, Resistance = Bad! The context is the possibility of an unlikely alliance of various smallish victim states against the Babylonian Empire – an Empire with which they had, under pressure, signed agreements. The Jewish king involved had been put in place by the Empire: he owed his throne to the Emperor. We inevitably think “Don’t resist Russia, just put up with the Russian “Empire” for two or three generations. When does strategic patience become tame surrender?

Quotes: Why do something that will destroy the city, and leave only a heap of rubble?

Clarifications: The reference to Jehoiakim is clearly a mistake. This is Zedekiah, and looking back to the invasion that had happened in the time of Jehoiakim and had put Zedekiah on the throne; while forecasting the second invasion and further destruction and theft of Temple treasures. The Temple treasures which had not been carried off initially, or destroyed, included two massive pillars representing the national twins of Temple and King’s Palace, and a huge basin probably representing God’s triumph over the chaos sea. The false prophets forecasting an early return of the original Temple stolen goods did have some sort of credibility in the reality that the Babylonian Empire was having troubles elsewhere; but, mainly, they were saying what people wanted to hear. Particularly in war time, any State has a strong preference for newspapers giving the official version of events, over newspapers giving the dismal truth. Centuries later, we can sympathise much more with Jeremiah pointing to Emperor Cyrus as God’s agent in getting the Jews back home; than with Jeremiah pointing to Nebuchadnezzar as God’s agent in exiling the Jews. You can understand the attitudes of Jeremiah’s contemporaries. After all, Nebuchadnezzar himself had pointed out to the Jews that he and his gods were making mincemeat of all the little countries and their ineffectual gods!

Questions: While taking on board that Zedekiah owed his throne to Babylon, and that you and your fellow countrymen had been badly behaved and deserved punishment, would you have been pro-resistance or pro-Jeremiah? (The resistance movement in the Second World War provoked Nazi civilian killings, but.....) Jeremiah donned a plank and bars (yoke) to make his point. How do you feel about action sermons, sermon visual aids? Does God use nasty people – who haven’t signed up as God’s little helpers - to achieve good results? Is a free press a good thing or bad thing? How do you feel about Bishop Bell, who in this country spoke up against our bombing raids on German civilian targets; and possibly forfeited the chance of being Archbishop of Canterbury as a result?