

Monday Evening Bible Reading Group: February 27th: Jeremiah 31: 1-26: Some Notes

Themes: This section really sings! O love that will not let me go! As with the Psalms, celebrating is whole-hearted. You may be reminded of the Beatles song “Love, love, love”. Israel and Judah re-united. To the non-Jew, it is a bit nationalistic: this is about God’s relationship with His chosen people. You do wonder a little about the further swipe at Babylon: elsewhere described as God’s chosen instrument of punishment for God’s disobedient people. It is interesting that again the nation is described as a woman; but, of course, if God is seen as male, and the primary relationship seen as (heterosexual) marriage, the nation must be female. Note that the lame and the blind are included – and included despite their disabilities, not without their disabilities.

Quotes: *God out looking for them. I’ve never quit loving you, and never will. Expect love, love and more love. Shout for joy at the top of your lungs. Their lives will be like a well-watered garden. I’ll refresh tired bodies; I’ll restore tired souls.*

Clarifications: The section on Rachel is intriguing, and of course it reminds us of how Matthew links Rachel with the slaughter of the innocents in Bethlehem – with Micah and Jeremiah in mind. Rachel was Jacob’s much loved wife, mother of Joseph and Benjamin; who died giving birth to the latter. She is pictured as mourning for what happened to her children and grandchildren long after she was dead. She was buried in a place associated with Bethlehem; and Israel the Northern Kingdom is associated both with Joseph’s two sons Ephraim and Manasseh and with Benjamin. One theory about why Jeremiah leaps back from Babylon to the earlier Assyrian occupation of Israel is the belief that Jeremiah himself was held captive for a time at Ramah and then released along with some Benjamites.

It is thought that the final verse about it all being a dream is an editorial addition.

Questions: **Do we miss out by being rather modest in our enthusiasm for God news – as compared with e.g. the happy clappy brigade? If the Jesus story is what we say it is, shouldn’t we be a bit more Alleluia-prone? Jeremiah talks about the Jews getting to know God in the Exodus wilderness: only two of those who set out from Egypt actually arrived safely in the Promised Land. Was the Exodus a success story?**