

Monday Evening Bible Reading Group: March 6th: Jeremiah 31: 37-40: Some Notes

Themes: a fresh start. Sins blotted out. Personal accountability rather than blaming predecessors; and punishment for your own sins. God is consistent and reliable. Planting and building – both are positive activities, but as a picture of our on-going responsibilities and God's on-going work, maybe planting captures the idea better (and better touches on the God/us partnership?)

Quotes: *I am sticking with them. You eat green apples, you're the one that gets sick. I will make a brand new Covenant with Israel and Judah. I will put my law within them – write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. I'll forget they ever sinned.*

Clarifications: The various Jerusalem places mentioned mark roughly the four corners of the city, and then the graveyard is added. Commentators recognise material from this passage in what Jesus says at the last supper, in what Peter says in his Whitsun sermons,; and, not least, in Hebrews 8 and 19. We tend to think of God's Covenant with Abraham, maybe renewed in the Covenant with Moses, and then Jesus with the New Covenant. But Jeremiah is talking here about a radically new Covenant relationship.

The rejection of the old "visiting the sins of the parent on the children" philosophy needs a bit of thought. When David's adultery with Bathsheba was "punished" by the death of their child, the child paid the extreme penalty. God wants us to blame ourselves for our own sins, but, while the child of a burglar doesn't have to become a burglar himself, the consequences of wrong-doing do spread out and carry forward – sometimes scientifically so, e.g. if mother has been a heavy drinker during pregnancy

Questions As today's Israeli Government has its nose rubbed in the Two State solution (Israel and Palestine) that the West favours, should they be reading Jeremiah as preaching Jerusalem is for ever GOD's City, or as saying Jerusalem is for ever the Jew's City? How easy is it to make a fresh start (including persuading others that we are up to it)? Where do we stand on punishment: penalty paid and move on, or never trust again? We ask and receive forgiveness at least twice in every Sunday service; but we still talk about the Final Judgement. Does God forget our sins? What is our Covenant with God (or do we leave that sort of thing to the Scottish Covenanters – who got persecuted for their enthusiasm)?