

Monday Evening Bible Reading Group: April 24th: Jeremiah Chapter 37

Themes: Humanity and power politics. The Egyptian intervention means a temporary relief in the siege, and people understand the situation in different ways, and test out a bit of near-normality in their own ways. Given that Jeremiah had been encouraging “desertion”, it is hardly surprising that his own attempt to go home during the lull in the fighting was seen as desertion. (Why didn’t he realise this...or did he?) J finds his cellar detention too much to handle, especially on top of being beaten up. You can understand the “traitor” feelings of the guards of the city. You can sympathise with J: a dark dank cellar, maybe with a bucket, maybe not. You can feel with the king, who desperately wants to believe that the lull is an end of the siege; who probably knows that his optimistic advisers are “yes men”; who isn’t sure about prayer, but wants to try everything; who half respects and half believes Jeremiah; who still kids himself that he might extract some optimism from Jeremiah. The imprisonment deal that the king and others offer is as good as could be expected – humanity in its good sense breaking through. It is only easy to sort out realism, optimism and pessimism *after the event!* What was Churchill being when he made his up-beat speeches at the low points of the last War: with the Germans on the verge of successful invasion?

Quotations: “You’re going to be turned over the King of Babylon.” “He was given a loaf of bread every day until all the bread in the city was gone.”

Clarifications: Zedekiah was the Babylonian-given name of Mattaniah. We are not clear whether the request to Jeremiah for intercession mentioned here is the same as that in Chapter 21: 1-7. It was before the lull that Jewish slaves were released, and during it that they were re-enslaved: so no real change of heart, just politics.

Questions: Are we too ready to hear “good news”? Why did the King go behind the back of his officials to ease Jeremiah’s lot? Does God forgive us for being human?