

Monday Evening Bible Reading Group: June 5: Jeremiah 40: Some Notes

Themes: A rather different version of the release of Jeremiah; but the same core message of understanding between the Hebrew prophet and the leader of the invading army – a unity made all the more poignant by the fact that Nebuzaradan means “chief of the slaughterers”! A new capital created at Mizpah, about 5 miles from the ruins of Jerusalem. Rallying round the new Governor, but note that Gedaliah, while of noble birth was not in the royal (David) line of succession, while Ishmael (one of those who signed up with him) was! Gedaliah was chosen by the Babylonians (perhaps recommended by Jeremiah) as a supporter of Jeremiah’s teaching that God was using the Babylonians. Gedaliah is warned about treachery on the part of Ishmael, but refuses to believe it. Everything seems to be going so well, and promises had been made. Note that, in Jeremiah, as elsewhere in the Bible, God’s actions are seen as speaking as loudly as God’s words.

Clarifications: Those who rallied to the new leader came from widely scattered parts of the country. In 1923 a seal was found with what looks like Jaazaniah’s name. The new arrangements could have worked out well, if only.... (J G Whittier wrote: “For all sad words of tongue or pen, the saddest are these: “It might have been”. “ The alliance with Ammon meant siding with a traditional enemy, who had every interest in seeing a weak Judah: a king who would have been no use at all in a fight with Babylon.

Quotes: “Your job is to take care of the land.” (There is some inconsistency between what is said here about a good harvest, and what is said in a later chapter about farming supplies as a bargaining counter in the midst of a shortage.) I admire the new leader’s “Try to carry on as normal” guidance.

Questions: Do you admire Gedaliah for not wanting to encourage murder, or blame him for not dealing with a potential traitor? Can we be too trusting...or not ready enough to trust? (Jesus trusting Judas?) In ECO terms, what does “Your job is to take care of the land” mean to us? Thinking back over Israel’s rather chequered history of leadership, (a) which leader stands out for you as the nearest to ideal; and (b) what would you list as ideal leadership qualities, e.g. if you were on the selection panel for the next UK Prime Minister?