

Monday Evening Bible Reading Group: July 17th: Jeremiah 48 and 49

This is quite a long chunk, especially Chapter 48 on Moab – which might well be less a Jeremiah solo than as collection of Moab prophecies. Chapter 49 lumps together a number of neighbouring territories which, like Moab, has an uneasy relationship with Judah/Israel; though in some cases the peoples were closely related. It is good to get the history and geography in context. Travelling people are discussed here, as people not entirely at ease with settled communities. The Jews were travelling people (nomads) for a large chunk of their history! The talk is of hostile neighbours, who sometimes took advantage of Jewish difficulties. But the Jews got “their” land by taking over what had been the lands of a number of other peoples, travelling through yet other countries to get there. Refugees/displaced people were a huge issue then and now; and the Holy Land was disputed territory then and is so now.

King David treated the Moabites very harshly. Please always remember that one of the Old Testament’s least flawed heroes (heroines) was RUTH: Moabitess, and ancestor of.....!!!!

There are some great quotes in Chapter 48. “You trusted in thick walls and big money” – didn’t everyone! “Nobody will ever live here again.” “Moab has always taken it easy: lazy as a dog in the sun.” (not the most wicked of life styles?) Could you blame Moab for taking advantage of Israel’s weaknesses? Weirdly, but significantly, and after all the horror and disaster, we have God saying “I will mourn for the people of Moab”; and “But you have a day coming when I’ll put things right in Moab”. Just sometimes, you think either or both of “This is a welcome change from putting human hatred into God’s mouth”; and “This Jewish writer is a big enough person to feel for the other side” – the British soldier pitying German civilians.

Chapter 49 has a real mix of places and peoples.. and gods. Ammon is Jordan. Its god Milcom. Edom was reputed to be descended from Esau: Jacob’s elder brother by a few minutes (and cheated out of his inheritance by Jacob). 49: 12-13 says, intriguingly, “If there are people who have to drink the cup of God’s wrath even though they don’t deserve it...! Quite! Then there is: “The young, the vulnerable, mere lambs and kids, will be dragged off” Ever known a war in which the only people who suffer are those who deserve to suffer? The nomadic peoples are recognised as, relatively at least, “defenceless”. (I’ve seen what can happen to Romany people, including people with learning disabilities, in Romania. Gypsies don’t always get a good deal here.) There is material here shared with Obadiah, Ezekiel, Psalms, Lamentations, etc. Elam is Iran – note yet another promise of restoration in due course, as for Israel itself. “Elamites” were in the congregation, along with other peoples such as the Medes, on the first Whitsunday!!

Just to reinforce the point about politics and religion being mixed up in those days, the Damascus kings tended to be called Ben-hadad: son of Hadad the Thunder God, also known as Baal.

Not much democracy in those days, but does democracy nowadays do what Jeremiah thought God-awareness did to promote good government in his time?