

Monday Evening Bible Reading Group: July 22nd to September 2nd 2024

July 22nd: Ecclesiasticus 24: 1-34: In praise of Wisdom. The fruits of Wisdom. Wisdom means keeping the Law. The author's own contribution to spreading Wisdom. The author and the Bible in general never tire of praising Wisdom – understandably so, because Wisdom is about what God is like, and we can be like at our best. There is some tension between the concept of Wisdom as universal, and Wisdom as specifically Jewish. (Just as the Chosen People concept can be chosen for the sake of the Jews or chosen for the sake of the world.) There is a bit of a parallel with the British Empire: good for Britain or good for the all the countries within the Empire? The Bible says a lot about the Wisdom/Law People not keeping the Law themselves. KIV the current debate about Orthodox Jews having to do military service, rather than (the young men) being left free to study the Law. What really matters in Judaism: Jerusalem (place), ritual (Temple), Kingship or personal and collective integrity? The Creative Word. Words are powerful. A lovely picture of Wisdom's fruits. Verse 21: cf Jesus! How do we feel about Law=Wisdom? Can rules ever express Wisdom fully?

July 29th: Ecclesiasticus 25: 1-11: Numerical proverbs. 10 happy people. The examples of good and bad are interesting. Would you choose the same examples? The wisdom of the old is in part a cultural thing, and one not always respected in the West; though age does mean experience! I like the comment: The older I get, the wiser my parents seem. Biden? Trump? I like the examples of happiness. Again, would your list be the same? The fear of the Lord looms large again: right relationship with God: right relationship with each other. Celebrating the fall of our enemies???

August 5th: Ecclesiasticus 25.13 – 26.27: Bad wives. Good wives. Good and bad women. Another list. What men expect of women. It is all rather sexist by our standards (this is a very long time ago!) However, women are given credit for their importance in society and their power for good. The Bible varies in its allocation of responsibility for sin between Eve and Adam. This writer tends to blame Eve. (The two of them were both there with the serpent!) The writer is a bit of a chauvinist, but he does recognise what good they can do; and that their beauty (moral and physical) can be "like the sunrise".

August 12th: Ecclesiasticus 26.28 – 27.29: Testing the qualities of men. The evils of bad speech. Deceitful speech. The context can tempt people into bad habits: wanting to fit in at work or in the social group, or indeed the church group where an extreme view/prejudice goes unchallenged. Does being busy stop you being good? Bad words go with lack of thoughts. You need to be trustworthy. Keep confidences.

August 19th: Ecclesiasticus 27.30-28.26: Divine punishment and forgiveness. Evil speech. Again remember that there is no after life in this thinking: reward and punishment are in this life. Forgive that you may be forgiven! (Now where else have we heard that... indeed where did we think it originated?!) Rage means loss of control. Rash speech is of

course much more of a threat in the social media age: one stupid remark can reach millions and last for ever. Be able to keep your mouth shut, and your finger off the keyboard.

August 26th: Bank Holiday. No Meeting.

September 5th: Ecclesiasticus 29.1 – 28: Lending money. Guarantees for debtors. Being poor but independent. An interesting combination of principles and practicalities. Realism? I love Be patient with the penniless. Verse 11: cf New Testament. Standing surety is as good as a loan. The focus on the basics of life is powerful. Be content with what you have, also has a New Testament ring.