

*These comments present one interpretation of today's readings; other interpretations may be possible. Comments are best read with the readings.*

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**Jeremiah 31:27-34**

NRSV

The people of Judah have failed to follow God's ways for generations. Despite Jeremiah's appeals, they have refused to return to his ways. God has sent the Babylonians to punish them for these sins by deporting many and destroying Jerusalem (including the Temple). Israel, the northern kingdom, suffered a similar fate at the hands of the Assyrians over a century earlier. Now, through Jeremiah, God tells the people that restoration of both Israel and Judah will come. V. 28 recalls God's commission to the prophet; Jeremiah now foretells the *building* and the *planting*. In early Israelite history, sin was largely *collective*: if a person sinned, it affected the whole nation. Jeremiah now explains, using a proverb (v. 29), that henceforth "all shall die for their own sins" (v. 30). The sin of one generation will no longer be inflicted on the next. Responsibility will be personal.

Vv. 31-34 tell of God's "new covenant". Like the Sinai covenant, (1) God will initiate it; (2) it will be God-centred; (3) it will be with the same people; and (4) the people's response will be shown in obeying the same Law. Unlike the old covenant, (1) it will be *written on their hearts* (v. 33, in their consciences), thus keeping it will be up to the will of each person; (2) a person's lifestyle will reflect seeing God in every action and situation, for "they shall all know me" (v. 34); (3) God will forgive, he will "remember their sin no more": everyone will always be faithful; and (4) the pact will last forever: as v. 36 says, it will be as durable as the "fixed order" of the universe. God will remain the same; the change will be in humans. They will be recreated so as to be capable of keeping the pact. So many will the people of God be that their city, Jerusalem, will need to be enlarged (v. 38). "It shall never again be ... overthrown" (v. 40). When will this happen? Jeremiah uses the phrase "after those days" (v. 33) to speak of the end times, a time when God will directly intervene in human history.

**Psalms 119:97-104**

NRSV

This is the longest of the psalms, being made up of 22 8-line stanzas. Our reading is the thirteenth; in Hebrew, each line begins with the letter *mem*, the thirteenth letter in the alphabet. This stanza, as do the others, talks about "love" of the Law, which is called by several names: "commandment" (v. 98), "decrees" (v. 99), "precepts" (vv. 100, 104), "word[s]" (vv. 101, 103) and "ordinances" (v. 102). This stanza emphasizes "meditation" (vv. 97, 99) of Mosaic law. Studying it makes the psalmist "wiser" (v. 98) than "my enemies", those who rely on worldly wisdom; such wisdom can desert one. True wisdom breaks the barriers of education (v. 99) and age (v. 100). Knowing it restrains him from evil ways (v. 101), even to abhorring ungodly behaviour (v. 104). Through meditation, the psalmist comes to "understanding" God, to really knowing him.

**2 Timothy 3:14-4:5**

NRSV

In Palestine, based on popular books, people thought that a time of moral decay would precede the end of the world. The author of this book sees the decadence resulting from false teaching as contributing to this (3:1-9). Timothy has Paul's example to follow, particularly the "persecutions" (3:11) he endured. Suffering for Christ is part of being Christian (3:12). While true Christians will be shown to be godly, false teachers "will go from bad to worse, deceiving others and being deceived" (3:13) by the devil.

But Timothy, "continue" (3:14), stand fast, in what Paul and your family have taught you! ("Whom" is plural in Greek.) Remember that the Old Testament ("sacred writings", 3:15), interpreted in the Christian community ("faith in Christ ...") tells you about "salvation", about Christ. "All scripture" (3:16), possibly including some New Testament books, has authority rooted in God and so gives a basis for human conduct. It enables all who speak for God ("belongs to God", 3:17: literally *man of God*), equipping them for good works, including "teaching ..." (v. 16).

The author now begins his conclusion. Thinking ahead to Christ's second coming, "his appearing" (4:1), when he will "judge" and begin ruling all creation ("kingdom"), he now urges Timothy to "proclaim" (4:2) the good news, whether the time seems propitious or not (for God's word is always *in season*). False teachers are undermining the faith now; perhaps "the time is coming" (4:3) when no one will adhere to the true faith. ("Myths", 4:4, are probably changes or accretions to doctrine handed down from the apostles.) In 4:6-8, Paul sees his death as being close, so he hands on his ministry to Timothy and other future leaders. The ministry is now Timothy's ("your", 4:5). May he, like Paul, remain steadfast ("sober") as he evangelizes, visiting various cities – even enduring "suffering".

**Luke 18:1-8**

NRSV

Some Pharisees have asked Jesus when the kingdom of God will come; he has answered: it is already "among you" (17:21). Using examples from the Old Testament, he has warned his disciples that its full coming will be sudden and unexpected; many people will miss it, being preoccupied with worldly affairs.

In Jewish society, a "widow" (v. 3) had no legal status; she was powerless. The story tells us twice that the judge is a rogue: he neither respects God nor cares about other people (vv. 2, 4). So why would Jesus tell an absurd story? Because such stories are easily remembered and are likely to be retold.

Jesus uses this incongruous story to teach the disciples a lesson. If even this rogue listens to a petition (eventually), how much more so will God, loving as he is, hear and answer the prayers of the faithful, those whom he has "chosen" (v. 7), by again sending Christ, to judge. He will grant them justice soon after he comes ("quickly", v. 8); however, they cannot know when he will come. So do not "lose heart" (v. 1) and persist "day and night" (v. 7) in prayer, seeking the completion of the coming of the Kingdom. But, Jesus wonders, will any still be faithful then, or will they all be preoccupied by other matters?