

## **Monday Evening Bible Reading Group: Monday October 31: Jeremiah 14&15**

**Themes:** First a reminder that chapters were imposed, not in the “original”, and that the text we have is what editors wanted to include, sometimes because they thought it fitted there, and sometimes because they just wanted to make sure it wasn’t lost. A passage may be about Jeremiah and/or his themes, but drawn from somewhere else. As with today’s speech makers, they may be deliberately quoting or just recalling words that resonated, not really conscious of the source. Some of the most powerful material in the whole book is found here.

What we might call climate change or power politics is seen here as associated with individual and collective sin. To pray “successfully” to God, you have to be in tune with God; AND not just turn to him when there is a crisis. Jeremiah at times feels rejected by both his intended audience and by his commissioning God. A wonderful juxtaposition of the tourist God who sees but apparently either doesn’t care or can’t do anything, and the suffering God. The idea of God suffering is deeply challenging. The atheist will say that our suffering God is illogical projection of our impotent suffering onto a non-existent deity: just as our remote all-powerful God is wish-fulfilment! Jeremiah asks God how the people can be blamed for where false prophets and leaders claiming to speak for God have led them. [“I blame the Government...the Council...the education system...my parents...”]

To many Jews, Jeremiah saying that God wasn’t inextricably linked to them was blasphemy: no Chosen People, no Temple! A very profound question about God’s love being conditional (Covenant) or unconditional.

**Quotations:** “Why are you (God) acting like a tourist?” (14.7) “God, have you said your final NO to Judah?” (14.19) “We looked for healing, and you kicked us in the stomach!” (14.20) “Don’t break faith with us” (14.20) “Unlucky mother, that you had me as a son!” (15.10) “You’re nothing, God, but a mirage!” (15.18)

**Clarifications:** King Manasseh had died 50 years earlier, after repenting in one version: rather odd to blame him for current disasters. This is about the unclear dividing line between inherited/customary evil, and personal bad choices. Does were believed to be very good parents, and wild asses to be very good survivors. Note the rejection which is the reversal of the Exodus choice. The city gates were where judgements were given and business deals settled.

**Questions:** Is religion more about how we respond to what happens, than about attempts to explain what happens? [ e.g. the troubles in Ukraine may be more about Putin’s vanity than about God using Russia to punish Ukraine for poor institutions or whatever; but the Christian issue is how we respond.] Do we tune into God rather selectively? Does God expect too much of us? How do you find running with the crowd as opposed to standing

up to the crowd? How do ordinary folk judge which prophet/economist to listen to? Is God's love conditional or unconditional? (KIV parental love) Jeremiah is very honest with God; are we a bit too polite?