

**Monday Evening Bible Reading Group: December 12: Jeremiah 21: 11-end, 22 and 23: 1-8:
Some Notes**

A reminder that this Book does not follow a consistent time line. We have just had a story set in the time of Zedekiah. Here we have a collection of comments on a succession of Kings of Judah. Josiah was a good guy, who reigned for 30 years. One of his younger sons (Shallum/Jehoahaz) succeeded him. He lasted only about 3 months before being carted off to Egypt by the Pharaoh. The Pharaoh replaced him with an older brother, Jehoiakim, who invested in extravagant prestige projects rather than good government. He came to a sticky end and died un-lamented. His teenage son Jehoiachin/ Coniah succeeded, but after 3 months was carried off by the Babylonians and died in exile. Zedekiah/Mattaniah, another son of Josiah and Jeremiah's enemy, was appointed by the Babylonians. (He later turned against them and so provoked the next and final siege.)

Themes: The Chosen People of the Promised Land had to learn that they could not enjoy rights without obligations. God wasn't on their side regardless of their behaviour. A just God expects his followers to live justice – especially justice for the most vulnerable, such as orphans, widows and the homeless. Rulers and Leaders had to do real shepherding, not exploitation and self-aggrandisement. New shepherds are promised, and in particular a Saviour Shepherd.

Quotes: God's "fierce anger". "I'll hire a demolition crew." "They walked out on the covenant of their God." "Woe to him who builds palaces, but destroys lives." "They'll give him a donkey's funeral." "He's the last of his line: the last of the kings." "God who puts everything right." The last two verses are worth reading again and again.

Clarifications: "Zedekiah" can be read as meaning "The Lord is our righteousness". In other words, Jeremiah is contrasting King Zedekiah as a miserable failure with the future Saviour – the Shepherd King. (The Good Shepherd!) The Branch reference is to something that lives and grows – hence our references to Jesus as "Branch" and "Shoot".

Questions: How do we and our institutions and society handle the choice between fame and shame? How would we characterise London: as the centre of sometimes corrupt capitalism which mainly benefits rich people, or as host of the St Martin's project which does wonders every year for poor people? With "official Christians" making up less than half of the population, is it still a good thing to have an Established Church, because this guarantees a place for the prophetic voice? Now that the PM might be a Hindu or Sikh or Moslem, rather than either a Christian or an Atheist/Agnostic, do we need to re-think our "Christian Country" approach to moral issues?