

## Day 217

### Habakkuk the Prophet

Habakkuk 1.1 – 3.19

Much of Habakkuk's prophecy is a mystery, given that it is very difficult to tie altogether and place easily in the flow of history. Some things are very clear. He is a prophet, the only Old Testament prophet to announce himself as such. He speaks of the rise of the Chaldeans, which are the Babylonians, and so he seems to be a contemporary of Jeremiah, although some scholars argue he could be earlier than this, in the time of Manasseh, or, because of possible alternative readings of his oracle, he could be as late as the time of Alexander the Great in the 330s BC.

Whatever the reality of Habakkuk's situation, the matter is clear. Habakkuk is questioning the Lord (YHWH) over His allowing the wicked to oppress the righteous. The Lord responds to him to say that the wicked always get their due retribution, but the timing of it is not what man would want.

Habakkuk seems to fit into that time after the death of Josiah, when Jehoahaz first then and Jehoiakim have taken Judah back into idolatry and the Egyptians are manipulating the king of Judah as a puppet, extorting taxes and dues from the people. The prophet experiences the oppression himself, and questions God's plan in this, and whether it is consistent with His character and integrity.

We learn from Habakkuk that it is not wrong to question the Lord, who assures us of His sure purpose being worked out, and encourages the righteous to continue in faithful trust (2.4) in the midst of trouble.

Hab 1.1 Habakkuk describes himself as a prophet (Heb נָבִי Nabhi) and his prophecy is described as a *massa*' (Heb מַשָּׂא ) a carrying or burden – describing something of weight or import. NIV calls it an 'oracle'.

Hab.1.2 – 4 Habakkuk appeals to the Lord in the midst of seeming injustice, with prayer seeming to go unanswered for deliverance. Placing him at the time of Jehoiakim, the Godly reign of Josiah is now just a memory; Pharaoh Neco is demanding tribute from Judah, and the people are being oppressed with taxes and demands. But God seems to be silent.

Hab. 1. 5 – 11 The Lord responds that He has a plan. He is preparing the Babylonians as an instrument of His *right-wising* justice, even though they are not a holy or righteous people. Their military power will be awesome, and their methods of besieging cities and building earth ramps to get into them will be very effective as a tactic against other nations. But the Lord is not unclear about their evil natures.

Hab.1.12-2.1 Habakkuk comes back with a supplementary question; how can God put up with the evil which is going on, whether it is Judah's or Babylon's or Egypt's? The superpowers around them are oppressing the smaller nations, but the smaller nations are oppressing their own people. Whomever Habakkuk has in his sights in this question, and it is somewhat unclear, it is obvious that he sees evil being played out, with no seeming retribution.

Hab. 2. 2- 5 The Lord assures Habakkuk that He will bring justice in the end, and that payback is unavoidable. After all, one of the declared attributes of God to Moses in Ex.34.6 is that He will not ‘innocentise’ or condone evil.

The unrighteous are never satisfied, are restless with desire and greed which drives them to get more and more. The righteous (Heb קִדְּוָה *Tzaddiq*, = straight, just), however, will remain alive, will survive by living faithfully (Heb בְּאֵמוּנָתוֹ יַחְיֶה *be'emunato yichyeh*), in dependence and continued reliance on the Lord's promise. This verse is quoted in several places in the New Testament, hinged on the Greek word, πίστις meaning faith or trust, but the Hebrew here in its context communicates the sense of remaining in loyal, *chesed* –based commitment to the Lord even in the midst of the storms around.

Hab.2.6-17 The outcome for the wicked will be to hear the ‘Woes’ spoken over them, for their corruption, their greed, their violence, their dissipation and emptiness.

In the midst of these judgements, we hear God's intention for the outcome of the story clearly; the earth will be filled with the experienced, weighty presence of God as the sea –beds are covered with water. In other words, the final scenario is heaven breaking into earth, and the gravity of God's being will be obvious as at the beginning. (2.14)

2.18-20 Habakkuk confesses the worthlessness of the idols which Jehoiakim has set up, and that the Lord is present with them, despite all the oppression. He is willing now to be quiet and wait for the Lord's promised outcome.

3.1 – 19 The book ends with a psalm, a prayer for the Lord's renewed intervention, as in the days of creation and of the Exodus. It is a musical piece, because the first and last verses give the musical direction . It is set to *shig-yonot* (Heb שִׁגְיוֹנוֹת ) which seems to be a kind of dance rhythm, quite ‘rocky’, the equivalent of a Scottish reel. Certainly, the content of the prayer is about power and conquest, so that would fit the context.

There are also *Selah* moments, which from the Psalms it will be remembered are probably instrumental interludes to develop the verbal themes.

After calling on God to renew His deeds of old, and praying that in the midst of his rage, God should remember His tender attribute of compassion (Heb רַחֲמֵי *rechem*) , the prophet recalls God's going before his people through the territories of Edom and Midian en route to the promised land.

Mixed in with the imagery of the salvation of Israel, there are also references to the creation, of the Lord's holding back the great waters of chaos, over which He is victorious.

While Habakkuk is terrified at the prospect of the coming Babylonian onslaught, he renews his faith in the Lord and his commitment to hold his soul to the Deliverer of old. Even though harvests fail, and crops are destroyed, even though livestock are stolen, yet Habakkuk will keep the Lord's promise in his sights, and rejoice in the *right-wising* that God has promised will come.

His strength to go on is not in his possessions, but in the Lord, who will make his feet like the deer's, able to find pathways through in the most precipitous and dangerous places high in the mountains.

The psalm closes with its dedication to the music leader, to be played on stringed instruments.

## Day 218

### Captivity Begins (605 BC)

2 Kings 24.1a; 2 Chron 36. 6 – 7; 2 Kings 24.7; Jeremiah 25.1- 38; 35. 1 - 19

2 Kgs 24.1a; 2 Chron 36.6-7; 2 Kgs.24.7 With the defeat of Assyria and Egypt at Carchemish in 605BC, Babylon is the new power in the region, under its king, Nebuchadnezzar. The Babylonians are quick to make Judah into a vassal state, and to deport many of its leading citizens, to make it easier to pacify the people left.

Although Jehoiakim is taken to Babylon in chains, it seems he must have been released for some reason, because he is recorded as dying in Jerusalem in 2 Kgs.24.6. All that the prophets have prophesied is coming about. Judah is breaking up, the Lord is bringing consequences for their apostasy.

Jer.25.1 – 7 Jeremiah reminds the people that he has been twenty-three years a prophet, telling them that these things would come to pass, but they have not listened to him. The guilt is upon their own heads for their intransigence.

25.8 – 14 Through Nebuchadnezzar, the Lord will capture Judah and remove her from the land. But there is a time limit put on this state of affairs.; it will last seventy years. Then Babylon herself will receive retribution for her oppression of the nations, when the Persians rise up to replace them.

25. 15 – 38 The upheaval brought by the Babylonians is going to effect all the nations of the middle East including, eventually, Babylon itself (here cryptically called *Sheshach*) ; after all, if God has not spared the nation where His own name dwells, why would He spare any others?

The shepherds of Israel, the leaders of the nation, will have no power to avert the coming crisis. The Lord's payback time has come.

Jer.35.1 – 12 The Lord speaks to Jeremiah a parable through the clan of the Recabites, who have observed a vow of total abstinence for generations. Jeremiah invites the whole male family into the Temple and offers them a drink. Perhaps there is a moment of doubt in the minds of the men gathered? After all, this is a prophet of the Lord, and they are in the holy place – could it be rationalized that they are in a different age now, and released from their vows?

But they stick unswervingly to their commitment, not only to abstain from alcohol, but also from settling in homes and planting crops. They are to be nomads, moving from place to place. They have ended up in Jerusalem to avoid the depredations of the Babylonians.

35.13-17 From this situation, Jeremiah addresses a word to Judah; they are to see the Recabites as a model of faithfulness. But the Jews are a model of disobedience. For this reason, disaster is coming upon Judah.

35.18-19. Jeremiah blesses the Recabites, and promises them from the Lord that their family line will continue unhindered into the future.

## Day 219

### Barukh Records Jeremiah's Words (c.603BC)

Jeremiah 36.1 – 4; Jeremiah 45.1-5; Jeremiah 36.5 – 32

Jer. 36.1-4 In the time of the Old Testament, writing anything down was a major exercise. It was not just a case of getting a few sheets of paper and picking up a pen. The writing needed to be done on animal skins or on papyrus rolls, and usually by a Scribe, one professionally skilled in writing. For this reason, Jeremiah appears not to have written his words down previously, simply declaring them in the public arena. However, now the Lord tells him to commit all of his prophecy, since the time of Josiah to writing. This is to be a 'last chance' for Judah to hear and respond to the word of the Lord, who does not want their destruction, but their deliverance and rescue

Jeremiah therefore engages Barukh (Heb בְּרֻכָּי ) whose name means 'Blessed', and dictates the whole body of his prophetic words given over the years.

Jer.45.1-5 The effect on Barukh of this terrible series of weighty judgements is to make him extremely heavy-hearted. The Lord therefore gives him through Jeremiah a word of promise, that although he has been deeply hurt by the doom-laden words of God through the prophet, and although everything is going to be overturned and brought to nothing, he will survive the deluge.

Jer. 36. 5 – 10 Because Jeremiah is forbidden to speak his own words publicly, he asks Barukh to go and read the scroll in the Temple courts, at a time of fasting when the people would be gathered there. It looks as though Barukh goes up onto a balcony in one of the rooms of the outer court to read to the assembly.

Jer.36.11 – 26 When the Temple officials hear what Barukh has been delivering, they get him to come and read it over to them. They realise what an explosive document this is, given that Jeremiah has been forbidden to speak publicly, and they recommend both Barukh and Jeremiah go into hiding, because they are going to have to report this all to King Jehoiakim.

36.20 – 26 When Jehoiakim receives the scroll, he has its contents read to him, and then brazenly cuts it up, bit by bit, and has it burned, with no sign of fear or remorse. The scroll would have cost much time and effort, and for the king to burn it so contemptuously, especially knowing what it contained, was an act of total defiance before the Lord.

36.27 – 32 After this wicked act of rebellion, Jeremiah is told by the Lord to repeat the writing; the Lord wants a written record of His word through Jeremiah. Jeremiah also has

a personal word for King Jehoiakim, saying that his rejection of the prophetic testimony will be met with his removal from the throne and disgrace upon him in death, because of his refusal to listen.

Thus, Jeremiah has Barukh rewrite all the words that were on the burned scroll, plus some additional ones.

## **Day 220**

### **Judah in Babylon; the Rise of Daniel**

Daniel 1.1 – 2.49

The book of Daniel is different to others of the Old Testament for a couple of reasons; first, much of the first chapters were written not in the Hebrew of the rest of the Bible, but in Aramaic, or Chaldee. From Dan. 2.5, the language changes. In this we see that the nature of the people was changing. They were living in a new era, when the old religious language was no longer known by everyone. And yet they also had a language in which they could tell of the greatness of God to a far wider cultural setting than before. Aramaic was the official language of the Persian and the Babylonian empires. So this book is something of a sign, a big departure from what had been. The Jews in exile in Babylon are now rubbing shoulders with Gentiles, and under the yoke of a foreign power. Later, Aramaic was succeeded by Greek as the imperial common language, which brought other issues to Israel and the Jews.

Many scholars believe that Daniel achieved its major recognition in the time of the Greek empire just after Alexander the Great, in the second century before Christ. The Seleucid kings, who had followed on from Alexander, were in charge, and they were determined that Greek and Greek ways would be the new imperial language after Aramaic. In particular, King Antiochus Epihanes violently enforced Greek culture and persecuted Jews who wanted to keep the law. So, where Daniel comes into its own, is as a timely encouragement to the beleaguered Jewish people who are being forced to change to Hellenistic, Greek ways of living, often at the cost of their lives. Daniel witnesses to the power of God to rescue his people from destruction, and to the faithfulness of God's people to be true to God in the face of oppression.

It's important to note too that in the Hebrew Bible, Daniel is not included among the prophets, but among the writings, more a wisdom book than a prophetic one. The story focuses on the wisdom and the inspiration of Daniel and friends and their effect on their surroundings, rather than on the closing apocalyptic visions.

Dan.1. 1- 2 The book starts off in Hebrew, the language of the Jews, a kind of wistful introduction reminding of the way things were. So we find here in chapter 1, the terrible fulfilment of the prophecies of Jeremiah, Zephaniah and others; the leaders and nobility of Israel are deported, and their temple is destroyed, its treasured looted and removed to Babylon. A great tragedy.

Dan.1.3 – 20 In Babylon, Daniel and his three friends are renamed and to be re-educated in the ways of the Babylonians. They are possibly of the royal household, almost certainly nobility. They are taken to the king's court, and will be fed a diet of meat, which is not kosher, and probably has been offered to idols. They have a choice, to conform or to refuse.

What's key about Daniel is that he does not rage against the empire he is now part of . It is as though Daniel is prepared to heed Jeremiah's words (29.11) , to settle and integrate with the community. However, Daniel, Hananiah Azariah and Mishael will end up being agents of transformation to the society and culture around them, and eventually will have an effect on the king Himself.

Even though the people of Israel are exiles in Babylon, Daniel becomes very much a light for God in a dangerous place, and rises to a place of great influence because of his faithfulness. Even though this is not the mission field he would have chosen, through Daniel and his friends, Babylon experiences the presence and the light of God in a way that they could not have done if the people of Israel had stayed in the safety of Jerusalem.

It might be asked of this opening story of Daniel, 'Who's feeding whom?' because Daniel does not only refuse what Walter Brueggeman describes as the 'rich, seductive food of Babylon', but he brings a new diet to them, a simple, yet healthier diet, which is ten times more nourishing than the king's meat. And Daniel and his friends find favour in the eyes of the King. They act with wisdom and winsomeness. Their object is to win over, not to defeat.

Daniel and his friends are renamed, they wear the clothes of the culture. They go as far as they might, but they live in boundaries. Their first allegiance is to their Lord God, and they will die before being untrue to His covenant. But they do not militate against their captors. Instead, they live from another provision; they not only refuse their captors food, but they bring an alternative which proves the wisdom of their insight, and glorifies the One who is its source.

Dan. 2.1 – 16 **Nebuchadnezzar's Dream** One of the most politically powerful men in history, this king of Babylon is more correctly known as Nebuchadnezzar II, the first having ruled some five centuries earlier. He ruled from 605-562 BC over the period of Judah's exile, and the destruction of the Jerusalem temple.

His name in Akkadian was Nabu-kudurri-usur, meaning O God Nabu, defend my firstborn, (Nabu being another form of the Babylonian God Marduk) He was the son and heir of Nabopolassar, who had destroyed the Assyrian empire, and its capital Nineveh in 612BC.

He is perhaps most famous for having the Hanging Gardens of Babylon built for his wife Amytis to remind her of her home in Media. He was an avid builder, and many of the wonders of Babylon fill museums and galleries today. He was also known for his cruelty and his thirst for conquest, overwhelming Judah, Syria, Phoenicia and threatening Egypt.

Nebuchadnezzar is troubled by a nightmare, so calls his spiritual advisors to him to tell him what it means. (The language changes from Hebrew to Aramaic in 2.4 as they answer the King.) However, he sets them a terrible challenge; he must suspect their integrity, for he raises the bar by saying they have to tell him the dream as well as the interpretation.

Why does he do this unreasonable thing? Perhaps he has lost faith in the religion of his time, in the spiritual gurus of Babylon, who would do their religious thing, but were not really that inspiring. Nebuchadnezzar loses his temper and commands a terrible

retribution on all the religious leaders of the time, called ‘the wise men’ by the Scriptures.

It’s interesting how the magicians respond – they say no one but ‘the gods’ are able to do what Nebuchadnezzar is asking, and they don’t live on the earth. Or is there one that does?

Dan. 2. 17 – 30 Daniel really sticks his neck out. He doesn’t have an answer, he doesn’t know the dream when he asks for a stay of execution. He just has faith in his Most High God. ‘I’ll tell you what the dream means’ he says, and then comes back and asks his friends to pray!

As a result of prayer, Daniel is shown the vision. Notice, though, how he is quick to thank God for His goodness, not ascribing it to His own gift or ability. And He does the same when he comes to Nebuchadnezzar. He points away from himself to his Great God, called in the Aramaic Elah Bishmayah (Aram אֱלֹהֵי שָׁמַיָא) – the God in heaven. He does not promote himself, but the God whom he serves. We need to note Daniel’s candidness about the source of this wisdom. It is so easy sometimes to hide God away, because we are afraid of sounding pious or even mad if we say ‘God showed me this’.

How great God is! Says Daniel.

Dan. 2.31 – 45 Then the statue. The essence of the dream is that human systems come and go, and do not last. There is an interesting tradition from the Babylonian writer Berossus that Nebuchadnezzar himself prophesied the downfall of his own dynasty, and no doubt this dream and its interpretation had something to do with that tradition. So although Nebuchadnezzar sees that, there is a different end to this version of the story. The stone from the mountain is a real key. .A kingdom, not human, which will outlast all other kingdoms. A king who will be greater than any human king. We know Him as the Messiah, Jesus.

This is the promise of Daniel, to a people under the thumb of those subsequent kings, in the days of the Greek kingdom, which they would have understood as perhaps the bronze or iron and clay – the rule of Greece or Rome.

It is a warning to us, not to put our trust in the human systems around us. We are seeing a huge global upheaval now, and the more connected the world becomes, the more global that effect actually is. We need to focus on that kingdom, and let others know that there is hope, not in the gold and silver, iron and clay of the world, but in the rock of the mountain of God, whom we know to be Jesus Christ, the God who does dwell on earth.

Dan.2. 46 – 49 As a result of the revelation, Daniel finds favour. Nebuchadnezzar acknowledges God as the God over all.

## **Day 221**

### **Jeremiah Speaks Out Against Judah’s Harassing Neighbours. (c 601-597BC)**

2 Kings 24.1-6; Jeremiah 48.1 – 49.33; Jeremiah 22.18 – 23

2 Kgs 24.1- 4 King Jehoiakim of Judah attempts a last fruitless rebellion against Babylonian overlordship, which leads to the surrounding nations, being employed by Nebuchadnezzar to harry and attack across her borders. The commentator on the history of the book of Kings affirms that this breaking of the Lord's people is because of the sin of the kings, especially of Manasseh and his bloody reign.

Jeremiah now delivers a series of oracles against these marauding neighbours, being used as political pawns in the endgame of Babylon's power-bid.

Jer. 48.1 – 47 In a long diatribe against the Moabites, whose territory lies to the south, east of the Dead Sea, Jeremiah makes it clear that they will not escape suffering as well from the Babylonians because of their oppression of Judah and Israel. Her idol, Chemosh, will be carried off (48.7) along with his priests and the nobility of Moab. This will be a widespread destruction across the whole region, Moabite settlements being abandoned .

The cause of this destruction is Moab's defiance of the Lord and their daring to exalt themselves in the region. (48.42) The end will be the same captivity and exile as Judah is experiencing; Babylon is setting the small nations of the Holy Land territory against one another, to wear them down in order to make them ready for the same outcome – deportation. (48.46) There is, however, a scrap of hope offered, as Judah has received, that Moab will not be wiped off the map forever, but will one day be restored. (48.47)

Jer. 49.1-6 A shorter oracle against the Ammonites to the east follows, with Jeremiah prophesying the same fate to those who have taken Gad's territory across the Jordan, under their detestable idol, Molech, who demands child sacrifice. They too will be exiled in the coming onslaught, although, as with Moab, they will find restoration at a later time.

Jer.49.7 – 22 Edom now comes under the Lord's scrutiny; their lands are south of the Moabites, between the Dead Sea and the Red Sea inlet of the Gulf of Aqaba. They are distant relatives of Judah, being the descendants of Jacob's brother, Esau. They too have been involved in the Babylon-sponsored incursions into Judah's lands.

Their capital, Bozrah and their other settlements are going the same way as the rest of the region. They will become like the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, whose site they overlook from their hilly territories (49.18)

All this is the appointing of the Lord because of their arrogance and belief in their inaccessibility to invaders. (49.16)

Jer.49. 23 – 27 Next, Damascus, to the north-east of Judah is the target of doleful words. They too will fall to the coming invasion of Babylon's might; the great defences which Israel's old adversary Ben-Hadad set up will be brought down in ruin.

49.28 – 32 Jeremiah states that the coming turmoil will reach even to the nomadic tribes of Kedar . Kedar was a son of Ishmael, and his Arab descendants had become wealthy stockmen over the ensuing times. Yet their tents and flocks will be grabbed (49.29) and they will be forced to hide in caves in the desert, because even though they have been employed as mercenaries to attack Judah, Nebuchadnezzar will one day turn and pick them off also.

49.33 The northern city-state of Hazor will also be broken and ruined, an empty shell in the coming flood.

2 Kgs.24.5 – 6a (mirrored in 2 Chron. 36.8a) Jehoiakhim dies and is buried in the royal tomb in Jerusalem, leaving his eighteen year old, inexperienced son, Jehoiakhin to succeed him.

## Day 222

### The Great Deportation of Judah (597BC)

2 Kings 24.6b, 8 – 9; Jeremiah 22.24 – 30; 2 Kings 24.10 – 20a; Daniel 1.1-2; 2 Chronicles 36. 10a, 12 – 16; Jeremiah 37.2

2 Kgs. 24.6b, 8-9 (mirrored in 2 Chron.36.8b-9a) **Jehoiakhin Becomes King** The eighteen year old son of Jehoiaikhim, whose name, paradoxically, is Jehoiakhin, comes to the throne. (Heb. יהוֹיָאֲחִיזְבָבֵד *Yehoyakhin* meaning ‘the Lord will establish’ – his father’s name had meant ‘ the Lord will raise’) He receives the crown at the most perilous moment for this nation. He continues the idolatry and apostasy of his father, and his brief reign lasts just three months.

Jer. 22.24-30 In a devastating word of prophecy, Jeremiah tells of the coming capture of the young king, with his mother Nechushta’, and their removal to Babylon. The Lord is pulling the signet of Judah’s kings off his hand, and removing their rulership from the state. Even his children will not see prosperity. It is a tragic outcome to the great promises of the Lord.

2 Kgs. 24.10 – 12; 2 Chron.36.10a (mirrored in Daniel 1.1) Nebuchadnezzar’s army comes to Jerusalem in 597BC and employs its tried and tested method – a siege work against the walls. During the siege, Nebuchadnezzar himself comes down to see how the work is progressing. Perhaps in an attempt to spare the worst for the city, the king and royal family and court surrender and are eventually deported north.

2 Kgs. 24.13-16; Dan.1.2 The Babylonians loot the Temple, its gold and precious items, and place them in their gods’ shrine back home. Then ten thousand of the citizens of Jerusalem are deported with the king, including the entire army, leaving the poorest behind to fend for themselves, defenceless and with no economy left.

2 Kgs 24.17 – 20a (mirrored in 2 Chron.37.10b-11) ; Jer. 37.1 (mirrored in Jer.52.1) As a sop to the people, and to maintain some form of order to the reduced population, Nebuchadnezzar installs a puppet governor, the late Jehoiakhim’s brother, Mattaniah. (Heb מַטַּתַּיָה *Mattan-yah*, meaning ‘the Lord’s gift’.) However, making a point, it seems, Nebuchadnezzar has the new ruler change his name to Zedekiah (Heb. צִדְקִיָּהוּ *Tzedeq-yahu*, meaning ‘the Lord’s righteousness.) Perhaps Nebuchadnezzar is pointing out that the Lord (YHWH) is bringing justice to this nation through his conquest of them. It is an ironic action on the conqueror’s part, and one which seems to have been common, given that Pharaoh Neco changed the king’s name in a previous reign.

There is little righteousness of the Lord anywhere to be seen, however, as Zedekiah continues the disgusting idolatry of his brother, rather than the Godly example of his father, Josiah. Despite the continued ministry of the prophets such as Jeremiah, calling

Judah back to the ways of the Lord, the diminished nation goes careering on its track toward destruction.

## **Day 223**

### **Jeremiah Continues Under Zedekiah**

Jeremiah 24.1 – 10; 29.1 – 32; 27.1 – 28.17

As the international situation becomes more unstable, the prophets of Judah, both those at home and in Babylon, are trying to make everyone feel better. They are insisting that Nebuchadnezzar will not get the upper hand, and that Judah will be back in its own land in a short time.

Jeremiah, however, listening carefully to the Lord, hears a completely different message.

Jer.24.1-10 In a vision of good and bad figs, the Lord tells Jeremiah, lest anyone should think the exile is a sign of punishment on the evil ones, leaving the good behind, that the good figs are actually those who have been deported to Babylon. These are the ones whom God will purify and who will be a blessing in their new homeland (people such as Daniel, for example).

But the bad figs are what is left behind, Zedekiah and his disreputable band of courtiers. They are fit only for destruction.

Jer.29.1-23 Jeremiah now writes a letter to the exiles in Babylon, telling them not to listen to false prophets who are telling them to keep themselves free of the Babylonians, because they will soon be back home again. Instead, Jeremiah encourages the Jews to settle down, to trade and to integrate with their host society. They are to become a blessing to them. There will be a gathering back to Judah, but not for the near future. The Lord's hand is with them to bless them in their new situation.

Jeremiah also prophesies trouble for the King and people left in Judah, and their coming disaster. He also foretells judgement upon prophets who are misleading the exiles into believing they will be home soon. The words of the Lord are not in their mouths.

29.24-32 A prophet living in Babylon, Shemaiah, then responds by sending a letter to the priest in Jerusalem, Zephaniah, asking why he has not arrested and punished Jeremiah for his seeming discouragement and negative words from home to the exiles, as he was previously instructed.

Zephaniah the priest reads this letter over to Jeremiah, but the prophet asserts that Shemaiah is lying, and not speaking the Lord's words. He will be punished for this.

27.1 – 22 There is another stand-off between Jeremiah and the false prophet Hananiah. Jeremiah is told by the Lord to make a yoke and put it on, and to send word to the surrounding nations, who have been helping Babylon harass Judah, that they will all be subdued by the Imperial power of Nebuchadnezzar, and any nation resisting him will be smashed.

The same message is directed by Jeremiah to Zedekiah of Judah; the Lord is fulfilling His promise of judgement for the idolatry of the past, and resisting it is resisting His will.

Prophets who bring a contrary message are liars, especially those who are predicting the repatriation of the Temple treasures very soon from Babylon. Actually, says Jeremiah, what has been left of the Temple furnishings will also be taken away in the final coming onslaught, only to be restored when the seventy year exile is over.

Jer.28.1 – 17 Jeremiah's word is then directly contradicted by Hananiah, who says that the Temple treasures will be restored in two years, as will the exiled King Jehoiachin. Jeremiah, sarcastically giving his Amen to Hananiah's word, says this will only be a true word if it actually happens. The test of a prophet, after all, is whether what he says the Lord is saying comes about in reality.

Hananiah now uses Jeremiah's prophetic yoke of Babylon, and boldly breaks it, saying that the Lord is going to break the power of the new Empire over all the nations within two years. Jeremiah then hears from the Lord a direct rebuttal to Hananiah, telling him that God has appointed Nebuchadnezzar for his purposes, and he will rule the region completely. For his false prophecy, Hananiah will have his life taken from him, and he dies in the seventh month, having deceived people about the Lord's true plans.

*The Lord is breaking the Jews out of their selfish, idolatrous parochialism, and sowing them forcibly into the nations, where they are to continue to worship the Lord of the whole earth, and to demonstrate His love and wisdom, His justice and righteousness to all. They will be forced to depend on the Lord, in this new 'wilderness of the nations', until the time when the Lord once again delivers them back to the promised land.*

*The diaspora of the Jews, which happened more than once through the centuries, would pave the way for the carrying of the Good News of Jesus Christ in the Roman era. Paul and Peter went, after all, to the communities of exiles who had done what Jeremiah had told them, making a place for the Word of the Lord among the nations.*