Importance of Historical Setting: Jer 29:11

One of the important things for understanding any biblical book is to understand the historical setting and context of that book. In many ways, it gives us the plain feel of how God is interacting with people, what the message is all about. I think it’s especially important as we’re studying the prophets and Jeremiah to understand what was the situation in Jeremiah’s life. What historical circumstances were going on? It’s critical in understanding his message. Many times when people are studying the Bible today we begin with the very pragmatic question. We want to know what does the text mean to me; but it’s more important to begin with the foundational question that really is prior to that: what does the text mean? Important to understanding that is the historical context in which that message is delivered.

Many people when they would talk about their favorite verses in the Bible or maybe their life verses point to Jeremiah 29:11, “I know the plans I have for you; plans to prosper you and to give you a future.” But many people don’t really understand what that verse is all about because they don’t understand the historical context. They think that it’s a general promise that God is going to make them prosperous, successful, and that everything in their life is going to turn out exactly as they want. But Jeremiah 29 was actually written to the exiles that were in Babylon. Jeremiah was giving this promise to those people but also telling them that they were going to live in exile for seventy years. So prosperity for them did not involve everything turning out the way they wanted. It involved seventy years of judgment. The things that would happen there were for their good. Ultimately there would be the restoration of their children and generations down the line. So it’s important to understand historical context.

There’s been a recent study on the book of Isaiah that has taken a verse out of the book of Isaiah and viewed that as a passage that is unfolding the judgment of America.
Again, those kinds of treatments of biblical prophecy are very popular. They tend to sell books and videos but they ignore historical context. So we have to understand Jeremiah, in light of the Babylonian crisis and the fact that God had raised up the Babylonians to bring judgment against the people of Judah. In a sense, what was going to happen was that God was going to tear down the old world of Israel though this judgment, but God was going to raise up something in the future that would provide a hope.

Jeremiah and the Deuteronomy 28 Background

The international background of Jeremiah’s message and ministry, that’s going to be the focus of our session in this hour, I want to go back to Deuteronomy 28. In Deuteronomy 28, again, laying out the covenant curses and the covenant blessings that Israel would experience if they kept God’s laws and God’s commandments, here was one of the curses that God had warned against them. He said, “the Lord will bring a nation against you from far away from the end of the earth swooping down like an eagle, a nation whose language you do not understand, a hard faced nation who shall not respect the older and have mercy on the young. It shall eat the offspring of your cattle, the fruit of your ground until you are destroyed. It will not leave you grain or wine or oil the increase of your herds or the young of your flock until you are caused to perish.” He goes on to say in this passage that Israel would even be reduced to cannibalism as they try to deal with the horrors of war and siege.

Also, part of those curses involved the threat of exile that they would be driven out of the promise land and taken away. Verse 64 says, “and the Lord will scatter you among all peoples from one end of the earth to the other and there you shall serve other gods of wood or of stone which neither you nor your fathers have known. And among these nations you shall find no respite and there will be no resting place for the sole of your foot but the Lord will give you there a trembling heart and failing eyes and a languishing soul. Your life shall hang in doubt before you, night and day shall be dread and you will have no assurance of life. In the morning you shall say if only it were evening and in the evening you say if only it were morning because of the dread that your heart shall feel and the sights that your eyes shall see. And the Lord will bring you back in ships to
Egypt, a journey that I promise that you should never take again.” So God warned them that if they were disobedient, he would drive them out of the promised land. Salvation history would be reversed and they would end up going back to Egypt.

Assyrian Exile and God’s International Sovereignty

In Jeremiah’s day that’s exactly what’s going on. Before the time of Jeremiah, the Lord raised up the first wave of writing prophets, the classical prophets, to announce to the people of Israel and Judah that God was prepared to send them into exile. The nation that God was using to do this was Assyria. The Assyrians ultimately took the Northern Kingdom of Israel away into exile in 722. They caused tremendous suffering and oppression for the Southern Kingdom of Judah as well. The prophets in the Old Testament remind us that this was not just a military crisis or a political event, it was also primarily a spiritual crisis. The Lord was raising up these nations. The Lord was directing these movements of troops as a judgment against the people for their disobedience. So God, raised up the imperial power of Assyria and the prophet Isaiah says that Assyria was the rod of God’s anger. They were executing God’s judgment.

Paul Gilkor says that Israel’s apostasy was the catalyst of Assyrian imperialism. It wasn’t just a political event, it wasn’t just a military crisis; God was orchestrating the affairs of these nations and these armies and their movements to ultimately accomplish his purposes. Someone said that one of the greatest comforts from reading the prophets is coming to an understanding that God is in control of the international scene. If God directed, controlled, and superintended what happened to kings and their nations and their armies and movements in the ancient Near East then the same thing is true if we look at the international scene today. God’s power has not diminished. There has not been a transfer of power; God has not given that over to humans. God controls the events that are in the world and God was using these nations to bring judgment on the people of Israel and Judah.

Ascendancy of Babylon

In Jeremiah’s day, we begin to have a transfer from the Assyrians to the Babylonians. The Babylonians are Assyria’s rival in the southern part of Mesopotamia.
There was always conflict between them and in the same year that Jeremiah was called as a prophet 626 BC the 13th year of Josiah, a man by the name of Nabopolassar became king of Babylon. Three years later, in 623, he declared Babylon’s independence and was actually able to accomplish it by driving the Assyrians out of Babylon. As a result of this, he established the Neo-Babylonian Empire. Nabopolassar was the father of Nebuchadnezzar. In the early stages of his ministry, Jeremiah warned the people that God was preparing to send an enemy from the north. In the book of Jeremiah that enemy is not specifically identified as Babylon until we get to Jeremiah chapter 20. Now we don’t know, did Jeremiah know the identity of this army? Did he know the nation that was going to attack Israel?

We don’t know, but we can see at the very beginning of his ministry God was preparing the Neo-Babylonian Empire for the role that it was going to play in biblical history. Jeremiah will later say that Babylon was the hammer of the entire earth. God was the one who was using them as his tool to accomplish his purposes. So as Nabopolassar established his empire and we see the decline and the fall of the Assyrian empire in 614. The Babylonians and the Medes joined together and defeated the Assyrians and brought about the fall of their capital, Asher.

In 612, the next Assyrian center to fall to the Babylonians and the Medes was Nineveh. It was the city where Jonah had prophesied to and it was the city that Nahum prophesied that God would bring judgment against because of the cruelty of the Assyrians. Finally, in 609, the final blow to the Assyrians took place at Huran. Judah’s King Josiah had actually been killed at Megiddo that year as he was trying to stop the Egyptians from marching north to help prop up the Assyrian empire. Josiah believed that the Babylonian empire and their rise was going to enable him to finally bring about Judah’s independence and so he supported the rise of this new empire. He was killed trying to stop the Egyptians. The Egyptians where actually unable to help the Assyrians and Babylon defeated them and really that was the end of the Assyrian empire.

Finally, in 605, the decisive battle that established Babylon as the dominate power in the ancient Near East took place in Syria, to the north of Israel, at a place called
Carchemish when Nabopolassar’s son Nebuchadnezzar when his armies defeated the Egyptians and whatever may have been left of the Assyrians at the time. From that point forward, all of Syria-Palestine was going to come under Neo-Babylonian control.

**Israelite King Deported to Babylon**

After he won the victory and pushed the Egyptians back to their homeland, Nebuchadnezzar came south and basically took control all of Hattiland or Syro-Palestine. In 605 BC he took away the first group of Judean exiles including Daniel and a small group of wealthy influential young people. They would be take away from Judah, trained in the language, theology, culture, beliefs, practices of the Babylonians and then sent back to rule over their people. That was the first wave of the Babylonian exile [605 BC]. While he was in Syro-Palestine in 605 Nebuchadnezzar also received news that his father had died and so he had to rush back to Mesopotamia, to Babylon, to assert his control over the throne.

The first wave of exiles in Judah were taken at that time as well, and from this point forward basically what would happen every year is that Nebuchadnezzar and his troops they would march west into Syria-Palestine and they would collect tribute. Judah was now a vassal of Babylon and they would answer to Babylon. Before the time that Babylon had taken control, the Assyrians had been the dominate power but now Judah would have to pay tribute and give their loyalties to Babylon.

The second wave of the deportation, the second wave of exile, took place in 597 BC and during this time between 605 and 597 particularly a king of Judah by the name of Jehoakim had wavered back and forth between giving his loyalties to Egypt or to Babylon. Jehoakim in some sense was hoping he could play the Egyptians off against the Babylonians and he was constantly waging the alternative possibility of rebellion against Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar finally tired of this in 602. He took Jehoakim into shackles and bonds. He took him back. He was prepared to take him back to Babylon as a prisoner. Jehoakim affirmed his loyalty to Babylon and he released him and allowed him to remain on the throne. In 598, he rebelled again. Nebuchadnezzar and his troops marched to
Judah to take care of this problem. Before they actually took the city of Jerusalem, Jehoakim was dead. He may have been killed by his own people.

There was a new king on the throne by the name of Jehoiachin but Nebuchadnezzar and his troops took the city of Jerusalem at this time and they took the second wave of exiles back to back to Babylon. He took the king off the throne Jehoiachin only eighteen years old and only been on the throne for three months. He took him back as a prisoner. There was a larger wave of exiles that were also part of the deportation and the most famous of these exiles was the prophet Ezekiel. Four or five years later after Ezekiel had been taken away in exile he would be called by God to be a prophet to the exiles who were in Babylon. Jeremiah was the voice of God and the prophet of God to the people that were still in the land dealing with those various waves of deportation. How do we respond to this? How do we respond to the Babylonians? What is God doing in the midst of this? Ezekiel and Daniel would be prophetic voices to the people that were living at exile during this time but that was the deportation of 597 BC.

One of the interesting things from extra-biblical history is that the actual Babylon capture of the city of Jerusalem is attested for us in the Babylonian Chronicles themselves. The Babylonian Chronicles give us the key events of Nebuchadnezzar’s reign. Where he went, where he marched, where he took his troops, and the tribute he received. In the accounts for the years 598 and 597 we have a record of the capture of the city of Jerusalem. The Babylonian account of this is: “In the month of Kislev [which was December 598] the king of Babylonia mobilized his troop and marched to the west. He encamped against the city of Judah, Jerusalem, and on the second of Adar, [which was March 16, 597]. He captured the city and seized its king. A king of his choice he appointed there. He took its heavy tribute and carried it off to Babylon.” So the account that we read in the Babylonian Chronicles is exactly the same as what we read in the biblical record and you can read the stories of that in 2 Kings 24:10-17.
King Zedekiah

In the book of Jeremiah, we have a narrative of the captive of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 597 BC. The final appendix to the book of Jeremiah is another account that is very similar to 2 Kings 25 that again gives us the story of the capture of Jerusalem. This was a central event. Now when Nebuchadnezzar captured the city the second time he did not destroy the city. He did not bring an end to the government in Judah. In fact, what he did was he placed another king from the line of David on the throne and that king’s name was Zedekiah. Zedekiah would become the final king of Judah and Zedekiah was basically set up by the Babylonians as their puppet. He was to give his loyalty to the Babylonians. He was to pay tribute to the Babylonians. He was to make sure that there was no military or armed resistance. In other words, he was there to protect the interests of the Babylonians. The problem is that as Zedekiah became king, he began to listen to his advisors, to military officers that were encouraging him to rebel and to resist Babylonian hegemony. Jeremiah was telling Zedekiah the only way you can survive this is to submit to the Babylonians and pay your tribute to them, and recognize that at this time in our history God has raised up the Babylonians as an instrument of judgment.

In the earlier days of Jeremiah’s ministry, Jeremiah had told the people you can repent and be spared of judgment or you can continue in your sinful ways and be destroyed. They had a chance early in Jeremiah’s ministry to avoid domination by another nation. But at this point, in time after the conquest of Jerusalem in 597, Jeremiah told the king the only option you have is surrender to Babylon or be destroyed. We learn both from Kings, Jeremiah, and Chronicles as we read about Zedekiah that he was a very weak ruler, and ultimately he made the decision to rebel against Babylon the same mistake that Jehoiakim had made that led to the second invasion of Babylon. He made the mistake of rebelling against the Babylonians and the Babylonians were going to return to Jerusalem again. So Nebuchadnezzar brings his troops there’s going to be an invasion and there’s going to be a major onslaught of the land of Judah by the Babylonians. Jeremiah again is advising the king. We see Zedekiah is this weak ruler who is constantly bringing Jeremiah in for conference, or constantly consulting and seeking advice from
Jeremiah and asking Jeremiah “what should I do?” or “Will you pray for us that God will deliver us? Jeremiah is consistently going to tell them surrender or be destroyed.

**Final Days of Zedekiah**

When the Babylonian army begins to capture the cities of Judah, we come to a point where there are only three cities that are left, Azekah, Lachish, and Jerusalem. Jeremiah is continuing to say, “surrender or be destroyed.” On the other hand, there are military officers, there are military advisors, who absolutely hate Jeremiah because they are continuing to advise armed resistance to the Babylonians. They’re going to say, “Look, Jeremiah is weakening the hands of our soldiers.” They’re going to do everything that they can to keep Jeremiah confined in prison away from the people where he cannot influence them with the message that they basically view as treason. Zedekiah is going to go back and forth, “do I listen to Jeremiah?” or “do I listen to my military officers?” He asked Jeremiah to pray for him, he asked Jeremiah to advise him and then he sends him back to prison. On one occasion the military officers are so angry at Jeremiah they throw him in a cistern they leave him there to die. Zedekiah allows this to happen until another officer convinces him he needed to get the prophet out of the cistern. So Zedekiah is a man who is incredibly torn between these two options and ultimately he makes the choice to rebel and resist.

The Babylonians this time are going to take Jerusalem again, and again this is the capture of Jerusalem that we have in Jeremiah 39 and Jeremiah 52. After they capture the city, they’re going to come back a month later and they’re going to knock down walls and they’re going to destroy the temple, They’re going to burn the city with fire. Zedekiah tried by night to flee away with his family when the Babylonians captured the city. He did not get far. He was captured in the plains of Jericho he was taken to Riblah, Syria and he ultimately was taken back to Babylon as a prisoner. His sons were executed in front of him, and the last thing that Zedekiah saw was the murder or the execution of his sons and then the Babylonians gouged out his eyes and took him as a prisoner.

So that’s the crises that God raises Jeremiah up for. In the beginning of the crises you have an option, you can repent, you can come back to God, you can be restored to
him, you can change your ways. If you do that you can avoid the judgment of this invasion from this army that is waiting to attack you. God will relent. There’s a real chance to repent of their decisions, their choices. Their responses to God are going to matter, but once the rebellion and the resistance sets in, once, in 598, Jehoiakim decided to rebel, to resist the Babylonian rule the choice at that point until the time that the city is destroyed in 586 is going to be one of either submit or be destroyed. Sadly the king of Judah and the final leaders in the land made the choice not to listen to God, not to listen to the prophet, and to continue with the resistance of rebellion.

Lachish Letters

We have another extra-biblical document that helps us to understand some of the historical context and setting of what it must’ve been like to live in Judah during this time. Those documents are called the Lachish letters, and the Lachish letters are a series of communications between the military commander in the city of Lachish, which was in Judah about 25 miles away from Jerusalem. It was a fortress city designed to protect Jerusalem from the invasion and the commander that’s in Jerusalem. They are dealing with the problem of this army that’s beginning to put pressure on both Lachish and Jerusalem. The cities of Jerusalem are falling one by one. There’s a mention in these letters of a prophet who was talking to the people, we don’t know if it’s Jeremiah or not. There’s a mention of the name of the commander at Lachish his name was Joash.

Final Context of Jeremiah’s Ministry: Judah to Egypt

There are references about the king sending men down to Egypt and it has a striking parallel with how Jehoiakim is going to send men down to Egypt to bring about the murder of the prophet Uriah. There is a complaint in one of the letters that there are military officers that are weakening the hands of the troops, which is exactly the same thing that is said about Jeremiah in chapter 38. Then in chapter 34 verse 7 in Jeremiah, there’s a mention that the only three cities of Judah that are left standing are Lachish, Azekah, and Jerusalem. In one of the Lachish letters the commanders going to say the light the signifier indicating the security of Azekah that our troops are still there the signifier is no longer burning and so we can imagine the possibility that the city of
Azekah that is still standing in Jeremiah 34 is actually fallen in that particular letter and the vice is continuing to squeeze on the city of Jerusalem. Ultimately the city was captured and destroyed.

After the city of Jerusalem was captured, the Babylonians released Jeremiah from prison. So the captivity of Jerusalem and the exile of Judah actually brought about Jeremiah’s freedom. The Babylonians gave Jeremiah two choices, they said that he could accompany them to Babylon but what they advised and recommended them to do was to stay in the land and to be an assistant and to help Gedaliah who was a man in Judah who had been appointed by the Babylonians as the governor of the land. Ultimately, Jeremiah made the choice to stay in the land with the poor people that were there. I think in some sense that reflects Jeremiah’s heart for ministry and his love for the people. For Jeremiah it would’ve been easier to go to Babylon.

The Babylonians knew that he had basically preached a favorable message about them. He was encouraging surrender, so they would’ve treated him favorably. But Jeremiah made the choice that he felt would be better for the people themselves to remain with the poor people in the land to minister there, and to help and to encourage Gedaliah. Gedaliah was part of a family that was supportive of Jeremiah. He told the people as the governor of Judah the same thing Jeremiah had said. He said settle down, serve the Babylonians, submit to their authority and God will watch over you and take care of you, and as we see things beginning to happen after the fall of Jerusalem in Jeremiah chapter 39 that’s basically what happens. The refugees begin to come back to the land, they begin to harvest the crops good things are happening but there’s another rebellion.

Overthrow of Gedaliah

There’s another resistance led by a man named Ishmael who is part of the family David and in this rebellion Gedaliah was assassinated. As a result of this in 582 BC there is a fourth deportation where more citizens, more people of Gedaliah were taken away from Babylon. So the Babylonians exile is not just one event. There is a deportation in 605, there is a larger wave of exiles in 597, there’s the destruction of Judah and Jerusalem in 586 and more exiles were taken away and even after Gedaliah had basically become a
Babylonian providence. There is a fourth deportation in 582. Now as a result of the assassination Gedaliah, Jeremiah himself is ultimately kidnapped and taken away to Egypt. He’s taken there by a group of Gedaliah’s military officers and one of them is Johanan he is the leader of this group and they believe that the best course of action is to flee from Jerusalem to some-how get away from the Babylonian reprisals that are going to come from the assassination of Gedaliah.

So, Jeremiah is taken away and the final context of Jeremiah’s ministry is best we can tell is that Jeremiah spends the rest of his ministry as a refugee in Egypt and he’s preaching there along with his scribe and his assistant Baruch. He’s ministering to the people and continuing in their worship of idols their rebellion to God. Jeremiah is preaching to them and calling them back to the covenant and reminding them that this catastrophe, this disaster, all of these things, have happened because of God’s judgment and the covenant curses. As I read the whole story of what happened to Judah during the time of Jeremiah I am reminded of the principle of sowing and reaping in Galatian’s chapter 6. In Galatian’s it says, “whatever we sow, we will also reap.” I can definitely see that in the history Israel and Judah.

The book of Hosea says Israel sowed the wind and reaped the whirlwind and the whirlwind is going to be these military disasters: First the Assyrian army and then the Babylonians. God took his covenant very seriously. God has planted the concept of sowing and reaping into the creation itself. It’s part of the way God has designed the world to operate. But God has also planted that concept into the covenant. The Lord has established the covenant curse that you will experience if you disobey. God uses military defeat and disaster and that happened to Israel is 722 it happened to Jerusalem in 587. That’s the historical context of Jeremiah’s ministry. The intentional sins are the kinds of things that Jeremiah is having to deal with God raised him up in the finals days of Judah which was perhaps the most desperate time in Israel’s entire history and that is the context of Jeremiah’s ministry.
Jeremiah and Babylon

Now as a result of that what I would like to conclude this lesson by focusing in on: What specifically did Jeremiah say about the Babylonians? What was Jeremiah’s perspective on the Babylonian crisis and Walter Brueggemann reminds us that Jeremiah does not just give us a political perspective he gives us a theological-political perspective because God is the one who is in control in the situation. God is the one who is bringing this judgment to the people of Judah. Here’s a couple of things about Jeremiah’s perspective on the Babylonians crisis.

Jeremiah’s Message to Israel: God is Fighting against Israel

Jeremiah is going to tell the leaders and the people of Judah that God is fighting with the Babylonians. Now I want you to think about what that must have sounded like to his own country our enemy God is fighting with them. So in Jeremiah 21 verses 3-7 here’s what Jeremiah has to say, “Thus says the Lord, ‘Behold, I will turn back the weapons of war that are in your hands and with which you are fighting against the king of Babylon and against the Chaldeans who are besieging you outside the walls. And I will bring them together into the midst of the city. I myself will fight against you with an outstretched hand and strong arm, in anger and in fury and in great wrath. And I will strike down the inhabitants of this city, both man and beast.” Verse 7, “Afterward, declares the Lord, I will give Zedekiah, king of Judah and his servants and the people in this city who survive the pestilence, sword, and feminine into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar.

One of the things you should hear in that passage is the repeated occurrence of the first person. It’s not just the Babylonians that are fighting against Israel, it’s the Lord Himself. God is sovereign over this situation, God is moving these armies as chest pieces to accomplish his purposes. Remember Isaiah 10, Assyria is the club or rod of God’s anger. Later on when God raises up Cyrus, in Isaiah 45 its going to say Cyrus is God’s shepherd. It’s even going to say he is God’s “anointed one” and that doesn’t mean Cyrus had a personal relationship with the Lord it simply means God was using these kings to accomplish his purposes.

Now when Jeremiah envisioned Nebuchadnezzar fighting against the city of
Jerusalem, what he’s also doing is he’s taken the holy war traditions of Israel and turning them upside down. We also have all kinds of stories in the Old Testament where God would fight battles on behalf of his people. God defeated the Egyptians and brought them out by the exodus; that’s holy war. God had enabled Israel the conquest of the promise land by bringing down the walls of Jericho winning that battle. There are times when David goes into battle and David can hear the troops of the armies of the Lord moving in the trees above him. Jehoshaphat goes into battle one time and God gives him the unusual command to allow the Lord to fight the battle and all Israel has to do is to sing the enemy to death. God fights Israel’s battles for them but in this situation God is on the other side. Imagine if you’re a baseball fan this is like your favorite player is a free agent, he’s no longer playing for the Red Sox he’s playing for the hated Yankees. God has put on another uniform; God is fighting for someone else. You can imagine why Jeremiah was not a terribly popular man with the military officials that were in the land of Judah.

**Jeremiah’s Second Message: Nebuchadnezzar is God’s Servant**

There’s a second thing. Jeremiah says in Jeremiah 25:9 and in Jeremiah chapter 27:6. Jeremiah is going to say Nebuchadnezzar is God’s servant. That term is used many other places to talk about many other people like Moses or David or the prophets. Throughout the history in the Old Testament God was working through the descendants of David. They were his vice regions; they were his servants; they were his sons. But now God is working through a foreign king and Nebuchadnezzar, not David, has become God’s servant.

Again it’s very similar to what Isaiah says about Cyrus, “Cyrus is my shepherd,” or “Cyrus is my anointed one.” Nebuchadnezzar is God’s servant and as a result of that God is going to give Judah and the other nations into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar. There’s a place in chapter 27 where God says he has giving both nations and even the animals of the earth into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar is become like a second Adam and he is the one who is going to rule over the earth temporarily.

**Jeremiah’s Third Message: It’s going to be 70 in Babylon**

A third thing that Jeremiah says chap 25 verses 11-12 and chapter 29 verse 10 is
that the exile will last for 70 years. There’s some discussion and debate about this whether it’s a literal number. I think that it is more of just a random figure but what it symbolizes is an entire life time. The people who are taken into exile will not, for the most part, be the ones who will be brought back into exile.

They're going to be taken down to Babylon, they'll live, and they'll die. It will be their children, it will be the next generation that returns. It’s very similar to what happens in the wilderness during the days of the exodus. The generation that comes out of Egypt is not going to be the generation that goes into the land. In the same way the generation that’s taken away into exile is not going to be the generation that returns. The reason this is especially significant is that there are prophets all around Judah in 597, when the second wave of exiles have been taken away and their message was in a very short period of time, God is going to bring back the exiles and the vessels of the temple that Nebuchadnezzar took away when he captured Jerusalem in 597. In a short time, those things are going to be brought back to Jerusalem. Jeremiah's message was, that’s not going to happen in a short time. Hananiah the prophet says in two years this disaster is going to come to an end. Now if you were living in Judah between 597 and 586, which prophet would you prefer to hear the prophet who said we're going to experience seventy years of disaster or the prophet who said this will all be over in two years? The leaders and the people bought the lie of the false prophets who were saying, “Look, this exile is only going to be for a short time.” Jeremiah says, “No, this is going to be a long time.”

**Jeremiah’s Fourth Message: It is Futile to Resist Babylon**

Number four, Jeremiah is going to say, it is futile to resist Babylon or to continue the armed resistance against them. You will not be successful. You will not be able to fight them off.

Israel's problem, Judah’s problem, was not a military problem, it was a spiritual problem. Even if some-how they had been able to hold off or to thwart the Babylonians, if some-how they could have convinced the Egyptians to wage war on the Babylonians, none of those military options were ever going to work. So this is why the military commanders are angry. This is why in Jeremiah chapter 38 they come to the king and
they say this, “Listen to what Jeremiah is saying. He is saying that he who stays in this city shall die by the sword by famine and by pestilence, but he who goes out the Chaldeans shall live; he shall have his life as a prize of war and he shall live.” So, in their minds and in their eyes, Jeremiah is a traitor because Jeremiah is saying surrender to the Babylonians. I remember during the Vietnam war people looking at Jane Fonda and referring to her as Hanoi Jane because they thought that she was saying things that comforted the enemy. In many ways that’s exactly what the military officers in Jeremiah's day thought about him.

Jeremiah says, “It’s futile to continue the resistance against Babylon.” In chapter 27, there is a political conference in Jerusalem that took place in the years 593 to 592. Again, it’s between the second deportation and the last deportation. In this political conference, the nations that have surrounded Judah come to meet with king Zedekiah and they are planning their strategy for how to coexist together, how to align together, so that they can stand and withstand the Babylonian crisis.

Jeremiah comes to that conference wearing a wooden animal yoke, saying, you are going to be placed under the yoke of Babylon there is nothing you can do about it. Don't listen to your prophets that are encouraging your rebellion. This coalition that you are forming may seem like a viable political option but it’s not going to work. It is hopeless to resist. If you surrender, you'll be spared; if not, you'll be destroyed.

**Jeremiah’s Fifth Message: Hope Lies with Exiles Not Those in Jerusalem**

There is a fifth idea and a fifth message that Jeremiah is going to convey about the Babylonian crisis. He tells the people that the hope for Israel’s future lies with the exiles in Babylon, not with the Jews who remain in the land. Again, let’s go back to the military crisis. Let’s go back to the time between deportation number two in 597 and the third deportation, the final exile, in 586. I am sure it was very easy for the people that were still living in the land to think this way: we were not taken away into a foreign country; we were not deported into exile; we are still here in the promise land. Somehow we’ve survived all of this. Therefore, we must be God’s favorite remnant. God’s blessed us; God’s left us in the land. The people that have been taken away into exile they
experienced God’s judgment against them. God has favored us.

Well, in Jeremiah chapter 24, Jeremiah comes to the people and he’s going take those ideas and again, basically turn them upside down. Jeremiah says, “I saw a vision of a bowl of figs, and there was a bowl of good figs, fruitful, and there is future and there is hope. There is a bowl of bad figs that are so contaminated and rotten that they can’t be eaten. What Jeremiah says is that the good figs are the exiles that were taken away to Babylon. The hope for Israel’s future lies with them. The bad figs that are too rotten to even be eaten are the people that remain in the land. They’re going to be the target of more judgment and God ultimately brings that about with the fall of Jerusalem in 586.

Now the point of that was not, those people that were taken away into exile were pretty good people, they lived righteous lives; that’s not the point at all. All of the nation had sinned and fallen away from God, but what the vision conveyed was the fact that whatever hope there is for restoration in the future, whatever life is left in the land of Judah, it’s not with the people that are in Jerusalem. It’s not in the people that are left in the land. God is ultimately going to restore his people by restoring the exiles and bringing them back to their homeland. Jeremiah 24 goes on to say that will happen when they turn to the Lord and when they seek him with a whole heart. But they are the future, not the people who are still there.

**Jeremiah’s Sixth Message: Babylon is Being Used by God to Punish Israel**

Jeremiah’s last perspective on this is that Jeremiah says that after God has used Babylon to punish Israel, God would punish Babylon for the sins that they had committed as well. One of the really important chapters in the book of Jeremiah; it’s really a hinge chapter; it ends the first part of the book and leads into the second part of the book, is God’s message about Babylon in Jeremiah chapter 25. In Jeremiah chapter 25:12-14 the Lord says this, beginning in verse 11, “The whole land shall become a ruin and a waste and these nations shall serve the nation of Babylon 70 years and then after the 70 years are completed I will punish the king of Babylon and the nation, the land of the Chaldeans for their inequity,’ says the Lord, ‘making their land an everlasting waste I will bring
upon that land all of the words that I have uttered against it everything written in this book which Jeremiah prophesized against all the nations.”

**Babylon Will Be Judged As Well**

So the Lord is going to use Babylon to judge Israel, but ultimately God is going to judge Babylon as well. Nebuchadnezzar temporarily is God’s servant, but in the future God is going to judge the king of Babylon. God tells the exiles, “Pray for the peace of Babylon, temporarily I am working through that nation, that city,” but ultimately God’s judgment is going to fall on them as well.”

Jeremiah performs a sign act in the second half of chapter 25. He holds up a cup of wine, and this cup of wine represents the judgment of God all the nations of the earth are going to stagger under its intoxicating power. The Lord says first of all Jerusalem, Judah, the cities, the nations, they’re all going to drink this; but then it says at the end of verse 26 “and after them the king of Babylon shall drink as well.”

When we go to the last chapters of the book of Jeremiah, chapter 50 and chapter 51 the message there is a judgment speech against Babylon where God is going to judge them in the same way that he has judged Judah. One of the interesting things about that section of the book of Jeremiah is that many of the same prophetic oracles that are spoken against Jerusalem are taken and reapplied and directed against Babylon. There was an enemy from the north that was going to come against Judah; there is an enemy from the north that is going to come against Babylon.

So it is worth thinking about these messages from Jeremiah as we are studying this book. This is the playing field. This is the historical background. There is an incredible crisis going on. The nation of Judah is in its final days, and Jeremiah is warning them of the judgment that’s coming. But it’s also Jeremiah’s message, it’s his perspective that God has given to him that is also going to give them hope. There is no hope of withstanding Babylon but out of this, the exiles will become good things. After 70 years God is going to bring them back to the land. That message of hope is ultimately going to sustain them and help them, and that’s how God will bring about the renewal and the restoration of his people.