

Hope in Exile. Jeremiah 50-51. [Revelation 18:1-8]

Sunday 17th September

I want you to imagine it is early morning, before your work day for your master starts, and you are gathering with a small group of your fellow Judaeen deportees on the bank of the Euphrates just outside the walls of the great city of Babylon, the prosperous, proud, secure city of Babylon who has brought your own nation Judah into subjection to it.

You are there to listen to a visitor from your homeland, Seraiah, who has come to Babylon as part of the government delegation of King Zedekiah in the fourth year of his reign, the king the Babylonians installed on the throne of David in Jerusalem when they punished the precious king's rebellion. [Jer. 51:59-64]

Jeremiah 51:⁵⁹ This is what the prophet Jeremiah commanded Seraiah son of Neriah son of Mahseiah, the quartermaster, when he went to Babylon with King Zedekiah of Judah in the fourth year of Zedekiah's reign.

⁶⁰ Jeremiah wrote on one scroll about all the disaster that would come to Babylon; all these words were written against Babylon.

Seraiah is standing on the bank to read from a scroll given to him by the prophet Jeremiah, and he reads for you what is now chapters 50-51 of our book of Jeremiah.

Jeremiah 51:⁶¹ Jeremiah told Seraiah, "When you get to Babylon, see that you read all these words aloud. ⁶² Say, 'LORD, you have threatened to cut off this place so that no one will live in it—people or animals. Indeed, it will remain desolate forever.' ⁶³ When you have finished reading this scroll, tie a stone to it and throw it into the middle of the Euphrates River. ⁶⁴ Then say, 'In the same way, Babylon will sink and never rise again because of the disaster I am bringing on her. They will grow weary.'"

He introduces his reading by saying *'LORD, you have threatened to cut off this place so that no one will live in it—people or animals. Indeed, it will remain desolate forever.'*

And when he has finished he ties a stone to the scroll and throws it in the Euphrates and says *'In the same way, Babylon will sink and never rise again because of the disaster I am bringing on her. They will grow weary.'*

It's an unusual way to start the day, but what have you, living amongst your conquerors, exiled as you are in Babylon, heard in Jeremiah's scroll.

You have heard, as we have heard this morning, a word of judgement and deliverance, judgement on Babylon and deliverance and restoration of God's oppressed people, a word of hope graciously given.

You have heard a very bold, even unlikely word, for Babylon is at the height of its power, extending its domination of its world, words which challenge the appearance of things, the dominant narrative of the society you are living amongst

Words you will need to cling to for things will get worse for Judah and her people. In seven years time Jerusalem will be destroyed, the temple burnt, and Judah will be no more.

Words that in their enduring beyond that prophesied destruction will continue to give hope throughout the seventy years of your exile.

Words that, as we will see, promise not just the end of the Neo-Babylonian empire that ruled the Middle East until 539 BC, but of all proud resistance to God which the Babylon these words speak of symbolizes

And so words that can speak hope to every generation of God's people, those who believe His word, as they live in a world dominated by those whose trust is in themselves and their idols, who do not recognise and so oppose the rule of the living God, a world in which God's people can be dispossessed and oppressed, feel they are the losers, and always live as exiles.

Words which can give hope to us

And Words which in giving hope help every generation of believers, help us, to know how to live in this world as they await the fulfilment of what God has promised.

Let's look at these words to see what is promised.

What is promised – the end of Babylon

Jeremiah 50: This is the word the LORD spoke about Babylon, the land of the Chaldeans, through the prophet Jeremiah:

*² Announce to the nations;
proclaim and raise up a signal flag;
proclaim, and hide nothing.*

*Say, "Babylon is captured;
Bel is put to shame;
Marduk is terrified."*

*Her idols are put to shame;
her false gods, devastated.*

*³ For a nation from the north will attack her;
it will make her land desolate.*

*No one will be living in it—
both people and animals will escape.*

Babylon has had a big presence in the book of Jeremiah.

In the book up to this point it has been revealed as the foe from the north that Jeremiah spoke about in chapter 1 [1:14-16], the foe that would visit God's judgement on Judah. 20:4-6 [21:1-10, 32:28f. 36:29]

Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, has even be spoken of as the Lord's servant in bringing the LORD's judgement to all nations 25:8-9 [27:6-11]

Jeremiah 25:⁸ "Therefore, this is what the LORD of Armies says: 'Because you have not obeyed my words, ⁹I am going to send for all the families of the north'—this is the LORD's declaration—'and send for my servant Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and I will bring them against this land, against its residents, and against all these surrounding nations, and I will completely destroy them and make them an example of horror and scorn, and ruins forever.

And, remembering that Jeremiah is not arranged in chronological order, in the chapters before these prophecies, chapters 37-39, we would have read of the Babylonians sacking and burning Jerusalem, and plundering the LORD's temple

Just as we would have read of the deportation of a remnant of the people before that destruction to Babylon, and of the instruction in chapter 29 Jeremiah gave them about living in the city, the people to whom this prophecy is also given.

Babylon has been the instrument of the LORD's judgement on his apostate people, people who had abandoned worshipping Him and worshipped idols, who had been breaking his commandments and oppressing each other in their greed and immorality.

But Babylon did not recognise the LORD as the source of their success – they gave the credit to themselves and their idols

In what they did Babylon was not acting to please the LORD, but to please themselves in the violence they visited on others

And now the exiles hear of Babylon's fate.

A complete end.

The Lord will make a complete end of Babylon

² *Announce to the nations;
proclaim and raise up a signal flag;
proclaim, and hide nothing.
Say, "Babylon is captured;
Bel is put to shame;
Marduk is terrified."
Her idols are put to shame;
her false gods, devastated.*
³ *For a nation from the north will attack her;
it will make her land desolate.
No one will be living in it—
both people and animals will escape.*

The totality of this destruction is emphasised in the prophecy.

50: ¹³ *Because of the LORD's wrath,
she will not be inhabited;
she will become a desolation, every bit of her.
Everyone who passes through Babylon
will be appalled
and scoff because of all her wounds.*

50: ³⁹ *Therefore, desert creatures will live with hyenas,
and ostriches will also live in her.
It will never again be inhabited
or lived in through all generations.*

⁴⁰ *Just as God demolished Sodom and Gomorrah
and their neighboring towns—
this is the LORD's declaration—
so no one will live there;
no human being will stay in it even temporarily
as a temporary resident.*

51: ²⁹ *The earth quakes and trembles
because the LORD's intentions against Babylon stand:
to make the land of Babylon a desolation, without inhabitant.*

And horrifying as it is we are told it will be a just end as God does to her what she has done to others

A just end

50: ¹⁵ *Raise a war cry against her on every side!
She has thrown up her hands in surrender;
her defense towers have fallen;
her walls are demolished.
Since this is the LORD's vengeance,
take your vengeance on her;
as she has done, do the same to her.*

50: ²⁹ *Summon the archers to Babylon,
all who string the bow;
camp all around her; let none escape.*

Repay her according to her deeds;
just as she has done, do the same to her,
for she has acted arrogantly against the LORD,
against the Holy One of Israel.

51:⁶ Leave Babylon;
 save your lives, each of you!
 Don't perish because of her guilt.
For this is the time of the LORD's vengeance—
he will pay her what she deserves.

51:⁵⁶ for a destroyer is coming against her,
 against Babylon.
 Her warriors will be captured,
 their bows shattered,
for the LORD is a God of retribution;
he will certainly repay.

The LORD is determined to deal with her according to her works, and her works are characterised by violence, greed and pride.

Babylon's conquests have been marked with violence.

She is the hammer of the nations who brought death to many

Jeremiah 50:²³ How the hammer of the whole earth
is cut down and smashed!
What a horror Babylon has become
among the nations!

51:⁴⁹ Babylon must fall because of the slain of Israel,
even as the slain of the whole earth fell
because of Babylon.

And she is without compassion, exalting at the humiliation of Judah [50:11] and refusing to let the captives go home

Jeremiah 50:³³ This is what the LORD of Armies says:

Israelites and Judeans alike have been oppressed.
All their captors hold them fast;
they refuse to release them.

Enriching herself by the plundering of the nations [50:11, 51:13] and enslavement of others.

She is arrogant, proud

Jeremiah 50:²⁹ Summon the archers to Babylon,
all who string the bow;
camp all around her; let none escape.
Repay her according to her deeds;
just as she has done, do the same to her,
for she has acted arrogantly against the LORD,
against the Holy One of Israel.

.....

³¹ Look, I am against you, you arrogant one—

*this is the declaration of
the Lord GOD of Armies—
for your day has come,
the time when I will punish you.
³² The arrogant will stumble and fall
with no one to pick him up.
I will set fire to his cities,
and it will consume everything around him.*

And in her arrogance she sets herself against the LORD

*Jeremiah 50:¹⁴ Line up in battle formation around Babylon,
all you archers!
Shoot at her! Do not spare an arrow,
for she has sinned against the LORD.*

*Jeremiah 50:²⁴ Babylon, I laid a trap for you, and you were caught,
but you did not even know it.
You were found and captured
because you pitted yourself against the LORD.*

Her confidence was in herself and her resources 50:35-38 – her officials, sages, diviners, her warriors and military technology, the wealth that allowed her to hire mercenaries, her natural defences in the moat that surrounded her walls

And in her idols, in whose name they swallowed up the nations 51:44

*Jeremiah 51:⁴⁴ I will punish Bel in Babylon.
I will make him vomit what he swallowed.
The nations will no longer stream to him;
even Babylon's wall will fall.*

Violence without compassion, greed and idolatrous pride characterise the rule of Babylon.

The LORD promises to humble her and her worthless idols [51:17-18], to remove everything in which she has placed her confidence [50:35-38] and to bring her end, an end which is pictured as more than the end of the Neo-Babylonian empire amongst which the exiles lived

The end of a Babylon which is more than Babylon

The description of Babylon and its judgement is given in language that transcends the fall of the 6th century BC Babylonian empire.

We hear that in the description of Babylon's role

50:23 – She is the hammer of the whole earth
the whole earth gets drunk through her [51:7]

*51:⁷ Babylon was a gold cup in the LORD's hand,
making the whole earth drunk.
The nations drank her wine;
therefore, the nations go mad.*

And she devastates the whole earth [51:25]

*51:²⁵ Look, I am against you, devastating mountain.
This is the LORD's declaration.*

You devastate the whole earth.
 I will stretch out my hand against you,
 roll you down from the cliffs,
 and turn you into a charred mountain.

is spoken of as the cause of all the violence on the earth [51:48]

51:⁴⁹ Babylon must fall because of the slain of Israel,
 even as the slain of the whole earth fell
because of Babylon.

And in the description of her pretensions

Babylon's name means in old Akkadian 'the gate of God', and she thinks of herself as one who could ascend to heaven [51:53], secure herself not only against earthly but heavenly foes, as the [51:41] the praise of the whole earth

51:⁵³ Even if Babylon should ascend to the heavens
 and fortify her tall fortresses,
 destroyers will come against her from me.
 This is the LORD's declaration.

Her fall also has consequences for the whole earth. All the nations hear of her fall [50:46 - contrast Edom 49:21]

50:⁴⁶ At the sound of Babylon's conquest the earth will quake; a cry will be heard among the nations.

And [51:9] her judgment reaches to the skies

51:⁹ We tried to heal Babylon,
 but she could not be healed.
 Abandon her!
 Let each of us go to his own land,
for her judgment extends to the sky
and reaches as far as the clouds.

And It brings [50:34] rest to the earth

50:³⁴ Their Redeemer is strong;
 the LORD of Armies is his name.
 He will fervently champion their cause
 so that he might bring rest to the earth
 but turmoil to those who live in Babylon.

51:48 heaven and earth and everything in them will shout for joy over Babylon's fall

51:⁴⁸ Heaven and earth and everything in them
will shout for joy over Babylon
 because the destroyers from the north
 will come against her.
 This is the LORD's declaration.

Babylon's destruction brings hope and joy to creation, heaven and earth

The Babylonian empire that destroyed Jerusalem and oppressed its people becomes a symbol in Jeremiah of all that arrogantly opposes God and oppresses his people and creation by its violence.

And this is a role for which it is well suited by its character and its history, for Babylon is Babel.

We first meet Babel [Genesis 11:9] in chapter 11 of Genesis, the story of the tower of Babel. And Babel is the name that is continued to be used for Babylon in our Hebrew bibles. Everywhere the English reads Babylon [the Greek name for the city] Hebrew reads Babel. Babylon is Babel

And the story of Babel is the climax in Genesis 3-11 of the outworking of Adam's sin.

The people said

Genesis 11:⁴ And they said, "Come, let's build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the sky [heavens]. Let's make a name for ourselves; otherwise, we will be scattered throughout the earth."

Having rejected the rule of the Creator in rejecting His word – as Adam did

Having embraced autonomy, the right to decide for themselves what is good and evil, right and wrong, without reference to their Creator

Humanity now seek to give themselves a name, an identity, independent of their Creator, only by reference to themselves and their achievements

To be who they decide they will be, not who the LORD made them to be

And they seek to take heaven on their terms, to displace God not just from His rule of earth but of heaven, of all creation

Babel is the epitome of human pride and ambition, of a determination to live and rule the world without God

The pride and ambition of Babel is embodied for a moment in the Babylonian empire of Nebuchednezzar who destroyed the temple of God – in a sense visibly displaced God from His throne. And it is embodied in every claim to absolute human sovereignty, to supplant the place of God in His creation – whether that is the Roman emperor, or the secular humanist who says that humanity is all there is, and humanity rules.

Babylon continues to be the sign of that pride in the Book of Revelation.

That Babylon, like this, is proud and complacent, confident in herself to keep her secure, saying in her heart

Rev. 18:7

Characterised as dominating the world, seducing the nations by her wealth, luxury, and sensuality, a wealth gained by violence, trading in the lives of people [Rev. 18:13]

Opposed to God and oppressing His people 18:24

The promised judgement of Babylon we read of in Jeremiah 50-51 does not just speak of the end of the empire of Nebuchednezzar, nor the destruction of the city of Babylon on the Euphrates. It anticipates and looks forward to the day when the LORD acts to judge all human pride that shows itself in denying God and exercising violent domination over others, all the greed that enriches itself by oppressing others, all the rejection of the truth of God for idolatry, a rejection that manifests in the persecution of God's people.

The LORD will make a full end, and at the same time deliver His people, bringing about a great reversal

What is promised – the deliverance of God's people 50:4-8, 17-20

Jeremiah 50: In those days and at that time—

this is the LORD's declaration—

the Israelites and Judeans will come together,

weeping as they come,

and will seek the LORD their God.

⁵*They will ask about Zion,*

turning their faces to this road.

*They will come and join themselves to the LORD
in a permanent covenant that will never be forgotten.*

In those days, and at that time

Jeremiah speaks of an indefinite future, but a time that will be the same time when God acts in judgement. At that time He will also act to deliver His people, to gather them to Himself in the land He has given them

*Jeremiah 50: ¹⁹ I will return Israel to his grazing land,
and he will feed on Carmel and Bashan;
he will be satisfied
in the hill country of Ephraim and of Gilead.*

*²⁰ In those days and at that time—
this is the LORD's declaration—
one will search for Israel's iniquity,
but there will be none,
and for Judah's sins,
but they will not be found,
for I will forgive those I leave as a remnant.*

This speaks of the return of those Jewish exiles to Judah at the end of the seventy years Jeremiah has already prophesied, when the Neo Babylonian empire will be destroyed by the Persians.

But Jeremiah is prophesying something more, a greater deliverance of God's people.

The language of deliverance is the language of the deliverance promised in Jeremiah 31

*Jeremiah 31: ⁸ Watch! I am going to bring them from the northern land.
I will gather them from remote regions of the earth—
the blind and the lame will be with them,
along with those who are pregnant and those about to give birth.*

They will return here as a great assembly!

*⁹ They will come weeping,
but I will bring them back with consolation.
I will lead them to wadis filled with water,
by a smooth way where they will not stumble,
for I am Israel's Father,
and Ephraim is my firstborn.*

*¹⁰ Nations, hear the word of the LORD,
and tell it among the far off coasts and islands!
Say, "The one who scattered Israel will gather him.
He will watch over him as a shepherd guards his flock,
¹¹ for the LORD has ransomed Jacob
and redeemed him from the power of one stronger than he."*

In Jeremiah 31 the Lord speaks of bringing his people back v. 8, of his people coming weeping v. 9, of the way the LORD has ransomed His people from the power of one stronger than them.

And the permanent covenant v. 5 is the covenant of Jeremiah 31, the new covenant in which there sins will be forgiven, the covenant called permanent in Jeremiah 32 Jeremiah 31:31-34, 32:37, 40, permanent because God will have forgiven all there sin v. 20 and give them a new heart to keep His law, the covenant brought into being by our Lord Jesus' death.

31: ³³ "Instead, this is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after those days"—the LORD's declaration. "I will put my teaching within them and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. ³⁴ No

longer will one teach his neighbor or his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they will all know me, from the least to the greatest of them"—this is the LORD's declaration. "For I will forgive their iniquity and never again remember their sin.

32:³⁷ I will certainly gather them from all the lands where I have banished them in my anger, fury, and intense wrath, and I will return them to this place and make them live in safety. ³⁸ They will be my people, and I will be their God. ³⁹ I will give them integrity of heart and action so that they will fear me always, for their good and for the good of their descendants after them.

⁴⁰ "I will make a permanent covenant with them: I will never turn away from doing good to them, and I will put fear of me in their hearts so they will never again turn away from me.

Jeremiah 50-51 speaks of the deliverance of the end when the LORD will bring eternal security and peace to His people, bring them to live forever in His presence for in this permanent covenant based on forgiveness of all their sins there will never be a reason when they will be driven from their inheritance

And with the judgment of Babylon there will never be a power to threaten them

The judgement of this Babylon will usher in the final deliverance of the Lord's people, pictured in Revelation 19 as the joyous wedding feast of the Lamb [Rev. 19:1-10]

That joining of the Lord to His people in unending joy and peace

Jeremiah 50-51 gives to God's exiled and oppressed people in every age a glorious hope of justice and deliverance,

A hope that the LORD commits Himself to fulfill, for what is promised in these chapters is a great work of God's sovereignty and His grace

What is promised – a great work of God's sovereignty and grace [50:33-34, 51:34-36]

The prophecy makes it clear this deliverance is all of God

50:²⁸ *There is a voice of fugitives and refugees from the land of Babylon.*

The voice announces in Zion the vengeance of the LORD our God, the vengeance for his temple.

Jeremiah 50:³³ *This is what the LORD of Armies says:*

Israelites and Judeans alike have been oppressed.

All their captors hold them fast; they refuse to release them.

³⁴ Their Redeemer is strong;

the LORD of Armies is his name.

He will fervently champion their cause

so that he might bring rest to the earth

but turmoil to those who live in Babylon.

And He will do it as effortlessly as He confused the language of Babel.

He is the Creator – no creature, let alone man-made gods, can rival His power 51:15-19

51: He made the earth by his power,

established the world by his wisdom,

and spread out the heavens by his understanding.

¹⁶ *When he thunders,*

the waters in the heavens are tumultuous,

and he causes the clouds
to rise from the ends of the earth.
He makes lightning for the rain
and brings the wind from his storehouses.

¹⁷ Everyone is stupid and ignorant.
Every goldsmith is put to shame by his carved image,
for his cast images are a lie;
there is no breath in them.

¹⁸ They are worthless, a work to be mocked.
At the time of their punishment they will be destroyed.

¹⁹ Jacob's Portion is not like these
because he is the one who formed all things.
Israel is the tribe of his inheritance;
the LORD of Armies is his name.

He is the ruler of all. He will summon the nations to do His bidding, use their own lust for domination to destroy the arrogant dominator of the earth.

Jeremiah 50:⁸ Escape from Babylon;
depart from the Chaldeans' land.
Be like the rams that lead the flock.
⁹ For I will soon stir up and bring against Babylon
an assembly of great nations from the north country.
They will line up in battle formation against her;
from there she will be captured.
Their arrows will be like a skilled warrior
who does not return empty-handed.

Jeremiah 51:¹¹ Sharpen the arrows!
Fill the quivers!
The LORD has roused the spirit
of the kings of the Medes
because his plan is aimed at Babylon
to destroy her,
for it is the LORD's vengeance,
vengeance for his temple.

And this great deliverance is all of grace.

He acts for Israel and Judah knowing the land is full of guilt

Jeremiah 51:⁵ For Israel and Judah are not left widowed
by their God, the LORD of Armies,
though their land is full of guilt
against the Holy One of Israel.

And their deliverance and return is as a forgiven people

Jeremiah 50:²⁰ In those days and at that time—
this is the LORD's declaration—
one will search for Israel's iniquity,
but there will be none,
and for Judah's sins,
but they will not be found,
for I will forgive those I leave as a remnant.

God's people contribute nothing to this great salvation.

All they are to do is to heed his call to flee from Babylon and return with weeping to the LORD, that is to repent and believe, to trust their deliverer and act on His call

Jeremiah promises a deliverance worked for us, not by us

To be received as a gift of grace – for its security is not in our perfection, but in our forgiveness,
We receive it and can, like Daniel, pray for it [Daniel 9] – but we do not work it.

Hope for us

This is a prophecy of great hope, given at a time when things looked so bleak

A Wonderful hope in its content – the vanquishing of pride and violence from the whole earth

And the eternal salvation, a permanent covenant which will give peace with God in His presence forever

A Surprising hope in God.

Hope against all appearance

But a sure and confident hope because it is hope in the almighty Creator, the God who has committed Himself to His people

Confident hope because it is hope given by the one who knows the future because He creates it, brings it to pass

What a contrast with human hopes, when all we have is ourselves and trust in ourselves. All we are left with is oscillating between an unreal utopia, unreal for it cannot deal with human sin, and a despairing future, despairing because we are confronted not only with our limitations but with that same sinfulness and our capacity to bring evil out of good.

But there is no darkness in this future Jeremiah speaks

The complete vanquishing of evil, the complete rescue of God's people, through the grace and might of the living God

And this is sure hope for us.

How can we know?

If you are living without hope that is an important question.

If you are finding it costly to keep following the Lord Jesus in a self confident culture that sees no need for God and rejects the rule of His Son Jesus – that is an important question

But we can be confident

History gives us confidence

The neo-babylonian empire, the empire that reached the zenith of its power under Nebuchednezzar, the empire that symbolized proud exclusion of God from His world – was ended by Cyrus the ruler of the Medes and Persians in 539 BC, as Jeremiah prophesied.

And the city of Babylon, though it continued for a time over the centuries lost influence and people, and is not desolate, an archaeological site, now adorned with the failed attempt of Saddam Hussein to rebuild parts of it. Babel is no more.

But we have more reason for confidence.

The power of the oppressor of God's people has already been broken on the cross, and the LORD has already secured the forgiveness of His people through the death of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Behind the arrogant power of Babylon and its gods stands the lie and power of the devil

Christ has conquered all those who held His people in subjection on the cross. Col. 2:13-15, Heb. 2:14-15, Rev. 12:7-12, Psalm 2

This is what the gospel proclaims

The Lord Jesus says Paul has on the cross *Col. 2: ¹⁵ He disarmed the rulers and authorities and disgraced them publicly; he triumphed over them in him.*

He has through His death destroyed the Devil who had the power of death and freed those held in slavery by their fear of death.

Hebrews 2: ¹⁴ Now since the children have flesh and blood in common, Jesus also shared in these, so that through his death he might destroy the one holding the power of death—that is, the devil— ¹⁵ and free those who were held in slavery all their lives by the fear of death.

This is what Revelation pictures when it tells us that the Devil, the accuser of believers, has been thrown down from heaven already.

Revelation 12: ⁹ So the great dragon was thrown out—the ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the one who deceives the whole world. He was thrown to earth, and his angels with him. ¹⁰ Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say,

*The salvation and the power
and the kingdom of our God
and the authority of his Christ
have now come,
because the accuser of our brothers and sisters,
who accuses them
before our God day and night,
has been thrown down.*

While he can afflict them on earth he can never dispossess them of heaven, never again cause them to be driven from God's presence by his accusations, his remembrance of sin – for they are forgiven,

So Already God's people, believers in Jesus, are delivered

Colossians 1: ¹³ He has rescued us from the domain [dominion, authority] of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son he loves. ¹⁴ In him we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

God's saving King has been installed at God's right hand, and the end of Babylon is certain, for God's King, His Son, will rule all with a rod of iron. None can resist His rule, or escape His judgement

The end spoken of in Jeremiah 50-51 is certain, for we are already enjoying through faith in Jesus the first instalment of what we are promised in these chapters

Forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Spirit in the New Covenant

This first instalment guarantees the rest of what is promised – the destruction of His people's proud oppressors, the establishment of justice on the earth, God gathering His people to His presence, the fall of babylon

This confident hope is ours

No matter how it appears, how sure, confident those who oppose God appear to be

No matter how dominant they are at any one time in history

How wealthy and powerful

How good their self promotion

How seductive their invitation to come and share in living a life of self rule and self-indulgence

And no matter how weak and frail and poor believers in the Lord Jesus appear to be

How much on the outer

The judgement of Babylon, of those who set themselves up against God, of those who in their pride make all others serve their luxury and comfort, of those who establish their domination of the earth by violence, of those who oppress God's people

And the deliverance of His people, those who put their hope in God's word and have no hope in themselves

Are certain

Believers in Jesus live with a confident hope, not just a personal hope, but a world, a creation embracing hope.

So precious in a world where many know only fear for the future or are tempted to embrace Babylon's violence to secure their future

Hope you will find nowhere else

Living with Hope – a tale of two messages

Having a sure hope Believers in Jesus should be people who live with a confident hope in God to fulfill His promises, no matter how it appears

People who are taught by that hope how to live in this world, how to live as exiles in Babylon.

There were two messages sent to the exiles in the fourth year of Zedekiah [27:2, 28:1 the fourth year where dealing with false prophets, 29:1-3]

We looked at the first when we looked at chapter 29, where the exiles were surprisingly instructed to

Jeremiah 29: ⁵ "Build houses and live in them. Plant gardens and eat their produce. ⁶ Find wives for yourselves, and have sons and daughters. Find wives for your sons and give your daughters to men in marriage so that they may bear sons and daughters. Multiply there; do not decrease. ⁷ Pursue the well-being of the city I have deported you to. Pray to the LORD on its behalf, for when it thrives, you will thrive."

To be good citizens and neighbours.

But there is always a danger if that is the only message you hear.

It is the danger of not just seeking the welfare of those you live amongst, but identifying Babylon, the place where human power rules without thought for or honouring of the true and living Creator, as your home, the place not just to be productive, but to be permanent, to cease to long for Zion, our heavenly home.

For Babylon's power, wealth and pleasure are seductive.

And Babylon can seem so enduring, so forever – until it isn't

And it can be hard to have your head in two places – Zion and Babylon, and impossible to have your heart in both.

Jeremiah 50-51 helps us keep living as exiles, longing for our eternal home, helps us to live in but not of the world

For it tells us of Babylon's character, it unmask what lies behind its splendour and complacency – violence without compassion, greed which takes what is others and lives off their loss and suffering, an arrogant pride that justifies its domination, a power that trades in death

And it tells us its end - its sure and utter destruction by God as He gives to her what she has given to others

And it calls us to flee from Babylon even as we seek its welfare, to not share in its end by not embracing its faith in itself and commitment to its own power

We need both Jeremiah 29 and Jeremiah 50-51 if we are going to live as God's people in our world while we await the return of our LORD Jesus

We need to keep the end in view to live well in the present, to live as Jesus' followers by who deny themselves and take up their cross

In the present be willing to suffer for doing what is right

In the present be willing to say no to the satisfaction of our desires to obey the Lord Jesus and love others

In the present To count others better than ourselves

Because we know in the end God will rescue His people, and judge those who stay in Babylon, the kingdom of self rule

And we need Jeremiah 29 to be committed to loving in the present, to be that good neighbour, so knowledge of Babylon's end doesn't lead us to separate from it, or withdraw, or impatiently seek the overthrow by our own violence of those who oppress us.

And we need that commitment to love those we live amongst if we are going to value our hope, treasure and cling to it

For where we love, we will be grieved by the sin of Babylon

We will be grieved for the impoverishment of so many by greed – think gambling or drugs

The sacrifice of so many lives in the violent quest for domination – Ukraine, Afghanistan, Syria

The blindness of complacent pride that is content to be unengaged with the suffering of others

And we will long for Babylon's end, and not despair.

Those who heard Seraiah on that riverbank were probably still perplexed and disoriented by Babylon's triumph, struggling to come to terms with what had happened, anxious about further loss in the future, and tempted to abandon a faith that would keep them the odd ones out in their new home in favour of just fitting in

But God gave them a word of hope, a sure word of Babylon's end and their deliverance., a word to lighten their gloom, allay their anxiety, strengthen their resolve

A word that would keep them living as the LORD's people if believed

A word some of them and their children lived to see the beginning of its fulfilment

You might be perplexed and disoriented by what seems the sudden ascendancy in our society of those who reject God, are confident in themselves and determined to pursue what seems right to them, and are willing to pressure believers to conform to their understanding of the world and right and wrong

You might be feeling that pressure to stop being the odd one out at work or school, the one who believes in a God who seems to have been discredited by the triumph of human reason, displaced by the dominance of human freedom, belonging they say to the past and not the present

Feeling the pressure to share Babylon's self-confident pride and indulgent sensuality.

Hear Babylon's end and See Babylon's defeat already in Christ, that its doom is sure for He has risen and He reigns

The LORD will make a full end, and at the same time bring His people to live in His presence forever

Persevere in what our God calls us to

Revelation 14: ¹² This calls for endurance from the saints, who keep God's commands and their faith in Jesus."