

Two Baskets of Figs

24: 1-10

DIG: The Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar conquered Judah in 597 BC and deported many in the reign of Jehoiachin. Who was left in Judah for Zedekiah to rule (Second Kings 24:14-20)? What would their world look like? What does each basket of figs symbolize? How would the vision have encouraged Jeremiah at that time? What is God going to do with the exiles, why and when? What is God going to do with those left behind? Why would ADONAI favor one group over another (2 Chronicles 36:11-16)?

REFLECT: Knowing yourself, if you lived in Jeremiah's day, do you think you would have preferred exile in Babylon or life in your homeland? Why? Are you at ease with things as they are in your native country under its present leaders, or do you feel "in exile," while waiting for a return to things as they should be? How "at home" should the universal Church be in the world? What looks like harsh punishment can turn out for our good (James 1:2-3). When has that happened to you?

596 BC during the eleven-year reign of Zedekiah

This message is contrary to what might have been expected. The Judeans who had been exiled, and not those who remained in the Holy Land, would meet with God's favor. The physical and spiritual shock of being extracted from the Holy Land had changed the hearts of the exiles and they were now ready to really know ADONAI. Not so for those who remained. They continued to be stubborn; spiritually deaf and blind.

The historical background of this vision was **the second deportation of exiles** to Babylon in 597 BC (Second Kings 24:10-17). After the exile of Jehoiachin and the leading citizens like Ezekiel, those who remained seemed to have been full of optimism for the future. The new king, Zedekiah, even became involved in a conspiracy with the surrounding Gentile nations for further rebellion against Babylon (see Eq - Judah to Serve Nebuchadnezzar). The false prophets spoke of a quick return of the king and his supporters in Judah were wrong. True, there would be a new day for Judah and the people of God, but the future lay with the exiles and not with Zedekiah and his supporters. The current optimism led Jeremiah into a more determined and even more relentless ministry. Judah, Jerusalem and the Temple were still to face a judgment that would be far more devastating than any that they had previously experienced.

Knowing that His servant needed encouragement, the LORD gave him a vision before the Temple of two baskets of figs. One was **good**, the kind that ripened early in the season, and one was **bad**, probably rotten figs that could not be eaten. After Jehoiachin, son of Jehoiakim king of Judah, and the officials, the craftsmen and the artisans of Judah were carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, the LORD showed me two baskets of figs placed in front of the Temple of the LORD. One basket had very **good** figs, like those that ripen early. These are the choice figs that come out in June (Isaiah 28:4; Hosea 9:10; Micah 7:1). The other basket had very **bad** figs, so bad they could not be eaten (24:1-2 CJB).

Then God asked me, "Yirmeyahu, what do you see?" This was to clarify in Jeremiah's mind what he saw and the meaning of the two baskets. "Figs," I answered, "The good ones are very good, but the poor ones are so bad they cannot be eaten" (24:3 CJB). Then Jeremiah repeated what he saw. Then the word of the LORD came to me.

The very good figs: This is what ADONAI the God of Isra'el, says: Like these good figs, I will regard the exiles from Judah, whom I sent away from this place to the land of the Babylonians in **the first and second deportations**, as good, just as I do these figs (24:4-6a). Just like people who looked favorably on the newly ripened figs, God will look favorably on the Jews in captivity. They were the real continuity between the past and the future. The folk whom YHVH had sent out into the unknown faraway land of Babylon would return for a new start with a new heart, the covenant secure. **My eyes will watch over them for their good, and I will bring them back (shuwb) to this Land.** These would not suffer the destruction and slaughter of the destruction of Jerusalem (see Gc - [The Destruction of Solomon's Temple on Tisha B'Av in 586 BC](#)).

I will build them up and not tear them down; I will plant them and not uproot them (24:6b CJB). Here we see the same powerful verbs of 1:10. Now the positive verbs plant and build are used. Indeed uprooting and tearing down, destroying and overthrowing are just around the corner. In His mind, YHVH was already anticipating the restoration of the good figs. These, for the most part (but not totally) were cured of idolatry. While in Babylon they would be treated well and prosper. In fact, Babylonian records point out that eventually two Jewish families became leading bankers for the Babylonian government. Yirmeyahu would write them a letter (see Ej - [A Letter to the Exiles](#)) instructing them to settle down and prosper. Consequently, the exiles in Babylon were better off than the ones that were left behind.

Then Jeremiah switches from a near historical prophecy to a far eschatological prophecy. I will give them a heart to know Me, that I am the LORD. When the final restoration comes it will be permanent. It will be the final restoration. They will be My people, and I will be their God, for they will return (**shuwb**) to Me. This could not refer to the return from Babylon in 536 BC because this did not happen with those Jews. ADONAI did uproot them again in 70 AD. Nor can this be talking about the present Jewish state because it will collapse in the middle of the Great Tribulation (see the commentary on Revelation Ds - **The Woman and the Dragon**). This final restoration, therefore, must be the final one after the Righteous Branch (see Eb - **The Righteous Branch**) returns at the end of the Great Tribulation. But there would not only be a restoration, but a regeneration. The Israelites will return (**shuwb**) with all their heart (Jeremiah 24:7 CJB, 31:31-34; Ezekiel 11:19, 36:26). This was certainly not true of those returning from Babylon in 536 BC. This is clear when we read Ezra and Nehemiah (the historical books concerning the return); and Zechariah, Haggai and Malachi (the prophetic books concerning the return).

The very bad figs: But like the bad figs represent the Jews still living in Jerusalem after the first two deportations. Those who stayed in Tziyon, who carried on the normal activities of life in the City, represent a dead end. They could only expect more catastrophe in the future. Those figs were so bad they could not be eaten, says ADONAI, so will I deal with Zedekiah king of Judah, his officials and the survivors from Yerushalayim, whether they remain in the Land or live in Egypt (see Gi - **Nebuchadnezzar Will Burn Down the Temples of the gods of Egypt**). The ones in Jerusalem were not the real Isra'el of the future, and King Zedekiah was not the real king of YHVH's people. Those who did not submit to the reality of the Babylonian exile were in fact in rebellion against the LORD's purpose (24:8 CJB).

What do you do with rotten figs? You reject them and throw them out! What do you do with good, tasty figs? You preserve them and enjoy them! God promised to care for the exiles, work in their hearts, and one day bring them back to their Land. Jeremiah even wrote a letter to the exiles, telling them that there was no future for King Zedekiah, who had succeeded Jehoiachin, or for the nobles that gave him such foolish counsel, but there was a future for the righteous of the TaNaKh that would seek YHVH with all their hearts.

They would experience the bloodbath of 586 BC. Everywhere I drive them I will make them an object of horror, repulsive to all the kingdoms of the earth, a disgrace, a byword, a laughingstock and a curse; and I will send sword, famine and plague among them until they have disappeared from the Land I gave them. And their ancestors would suffer a similar fate in 70 AD (24:9-10 CJB). Jewish history certainly bears the truth of this prophecy.