



Count on it

Living in the certainty of God's Word



BICKERING IN BABYLON

This easy-to-perform sketch will fit best between the Isaiah 55.1–11 Bible reading and the talk. It raises questions about (1) how this prophecy might have been received by the Israelite exiles in Babylon, (2) how we respond to the challenges God calls us to in Scripture, and (3) highlights the track record of God's Word bringing powerful change.

Cast of two. Names of characters can be changed depending on gender (e.g. Hannah, Naomi, etc).

HAGGAI sits typing at a laptop, mobile phone clamped to one ear. He is dressed in a suit.

HAGGAI: I'm telling you, this is the hottest story *The Babylon Babblers*' ever had. How the Grand Vizier managed to claim the Hanging Gardens under his ministerial allowances is beyond me. *(Pause)* And his wife claiming she needed a four-horse chariot to do the school run in; this from a government that says it's encouraging low emission vehicles. Have you smelled the sort of emissions four horses produce? *(Pause)* Yes, I've got Isaac at the Palace right now, following the story up.

ISAAC enters, dressed for hiking: rucksack, walking boots, walking stick. HAGGAI stares at him in disbelief.

I'm sorry; I'll have to call you back.

HAGGAI hangs up.

What on earth are you wearing? And why aren't you at the Palace?

ISAAC: Didn't you see the latest press release?

HAGGAI: What press release?

ISAAC: The press release from Isaiah. You know, the one about us going home, about an everlasting covenant, free pardons. Keep on the pulse!

HAGGAI: Oh, *that* press release. No, of course I didn't read it. We're meant to be covering the expenses scandal – *you're* meant to be covering the expenses scandal! That's the hot news.

ISAAC: Are you seriously saying some balding minister claiming for manure for the Hanging Gardens is hotter than a newsflash from the very top?

HAGGAI: They may be words from the top but, at the end of the day, they're just words, aren't they? Fancy speeches that make you feel good but – no disrespect – what have words from the very top ever achieved? It's not like they make the headlines, do they?

ISAAC: Really? 'Universe completed on time and on budget'? 'Almighty launches world's first floating zoo'? 'Rainbow praised by art critics for imaginative use of colour'?

HAGGAI: Yes, but –

ISAAC: 'Severn Trent Water denies any responsibility for Nile turning into blood'? 'Yahweh declares walls of Jericho structurally unsound'? 'Prophets soar after investment in fiery chariot'?

HAGGAI: Fine, I get your point. We'll run the story. There should be some room in the back pages.

ISAAC: That's not my point.

HAGGAI: Of course it is. We're reporters; we pick stories that sell. 'God calls his people back to Promised Land': we've a few readers who might glance at an article like that.

ISAAC: That's still not my point. This is one of those stories that's more than just a story. This is a story that demands action.

HAGGAI: I don't get you.

ISAAC: Remember when you uncovered that story about the Babel Construction Company going bust?

HAGGAI: Of course I remember it. Fine piece of investigative journalism that was.

ISAAC: But you didn't leave it there, did you?

HAGGAI: No fear; I was first in line to sell my BCC shares before they became worthless.

ISAAC: Exactly. And, likewise, this is a story that calls for action. If we want to experience the great things that God has promised us, about blessing Israel and the world, we need to obey him and go back to Jerusalem.

HAGGAI: But Jerusalem's a dump. Here in Babylon I've got a nice home overlooking the Euphrates, good job, generous pension scheme. I don't want to move. And the world's changed since he last made the headlines. Back then everyone worshipped him; here in sixth century Babylon we're a modern multicultural society. His words aren't so relevant now, are they?

ISAAC: God is calling us out of Babylon and back home to Israel: how is that not relevant? Apart from which, your 'nice' home has rising damp.

HAGGAI: Yes, but I've just booked an Easyboat minibreak to Assyria for the bank holiday; it'd be a shame to cancel.

ISAAC: Let's get this straight: you're opting out of the blessings of our Almighty God for the sake of a cheap package holiday crammed into a leaky galley with a load of sweaty Babylonians.

HAGGAI: Yeah. When you put it like that –

ISAAC: I mean, they don't even give you a complimentary meal on Easyboat.

HAGGAI: Okay, okay! I give in, I'll come. I'm going to miss this job though. *The Babylon Babblers*'s been good to me.

ISAAC: You never know what lies ahead, Haggai. God has a good track record of employing people with a knack for writing.

HAGGAI: Yeah, but can his circulation figures match *The Babylon Babblers*?

ISAAC: Like you wouldn't believe.

Written by Tim Crooks. Tim is a freelance scriptwriter/performer whose writing credits include BBC 7 and SAT7 TV. For further information, visit his website: www.wingandaprayerproductions.co.uk