

Baruch: Building a Legacy in a Crumbling World



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Isa. 53:1–5, Jer. 7:1–11, 28, 45, Matt. 6:25–34.*

Memory Text: “To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them” (*Isaiah 8:20*).

The world, as Baruch knew it, was drawing to a close. Jerusalem and Judah were in their final moments. Assyria, which had dominated the ancient Near East for more than two hundred years, was internally divided, engaged in civil war, and losing its grip on its vassal states. Meanwhile, a new superpower was on the horizon: Babylon. For a little time Judah had some respite and, under good King Josiah (640–609 B.C.), the nation managed to expand its territory and renew its commitment to the worship of the true God. However, with rapid changes occurring at the end of the seventh century B.C., time was running out for Jerusalem. King Josiah died in battle against the Egyptians (*2 Kings 23:29*). His sons, reigning after him, did not have the same status as their father, and they rebelled repeatedly against Babylon, a fatal mistake. Finally, in 586 B.C., Jerusalem was taken, the temple destroyed, and many Judeans taken captive.

Baruch lived in this time of dramatic change and loss. However, though his world was crumbling, he left a legacy that no king or war could destroy.

What can we learn from Baruch, our final background character in the Bible?

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 25.*

Baruch's World

Baruch's world was constructed around certain political, economic, and religious realities that dominated his nation at that time. Politically speaking, the country of Judah was chafing under the yoke of Babylonian domination. Strong nationalistic undercurrents affected all areas of society. People wanted to be free of Babylon. Economically, things were going quite well, at least for a sector of the population growing wealthier by exploiting the poor. And, of course, there was the religious system of ancient Judah, which was to form the foundation for all the society.

Read Jeremiah 7:1–11. What are some of the crucial moral and spiritual problems the people were being warned about? What parallels might we be able to draw to our own time today? Give special attention to verse 4. What were the people being told there, and what lesson can we take from that for ourselves?

Baruch's name means "one who is blessed," and Baruch does seem blessed. He was a scribe, which meant that he was a highly educated man. He seems to have come from a family of scribes, and he had the correct family connections.

Exactly how Baruch is drawn into the service of the priest and prophet Jeremiah we are not told. Perhaps it is the solidness of Jeremiah's connection to God that draws Baruch to him. Indeed, the social, political, and economic ideal that Jeremiah preaches is firmly rooted in God's revelation. Jeremiah is not afraid of standing up for the Word of God, even when it is deemed politically incorrect to do so. Through his visions Jeremiah has unique insights into the fallibility of the structures that his society trusted in, and he was called upon by the Lord to warn the people about what their actions would lead to if they didn't change their ways. Perhaps it was his desire to be a part of this that led Baruch into his special role.

Read again Jeremiah 7:1–11. How might these words apply to you in your own walk with the Lord? What things in your life need amending? What "lying words" might you also be trusting in? What other "gods" might you be walking with? How open and honest with yourself are you willing to be in confronting these questions?

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Jeremiah 5:4, 5*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Examine the challenges and persecution that Jeremiah and Baruch faced in delivering the Word of God to Israel’s leaders.

Feel: Identify with the expectations and disappointments that Baruch faced in his supporting role to Jeremiah’s ministry.

Do: Determine to seek God’s glory in everything, rather than seeking great things for ourselves.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Trouble on the Right Side

A Jeremiah’s whole life was one of great hardship; he was even kidnapped and carried off to Egypt, the very place he warned Israel’s leaders not to go—and apparently he died there. How did Baruch share in Jeremiah’s persecution?

II. Feel: No Great Things

A How did Baruch feel about all the trouble he faced? God promised to save his life, but why did He ask Baruch not to seek great things for himself?

B Jeremiah never got kudos for speaking God’s words to His people; yet, he faithfully gave God’s messages. What was the danger of twisting the words of God to the people in order to make popular statements, as Hananiah did?

III. Do: God’s Perspective

A As we work for God, what perspective do we need to keep in mind about our own personal outcomes?

B Why should we refrain from seeking great things for ourselves?

► **Summary:** As Jeremiah’s scribe, Baruch wrote and publicly read many of Jeremiah’s messages. He also shared in the suffering of God’s servant, as we all are called to do.

Jeremiah's Scribe

The book of Jeremiah provides us with some unique glimpses into the writing process of the Bible. Baruch, Jeremiah's scribe, actually is participating in the transmission and preservation of God's Word. In Jeremiah 36:4, Jeremiah calls Baruch and—as he dictates a message to the people—Baruch copies it all down on a parchment scroll. This is an excellent illustration of how inspiration works. First, God does not physically take control of the prophet Jeremiah and move his hand as he writes. Rather, God gives Jeremiah visions and messages. Normally the prophet then formulates the message and writes it down. In this particular case, Jeremiah himself did not do the writing but dictated to Baruch, who then wrote it down. Baruch also communicates the message in public. Because Jeremiah is out of favor in the court and has been denied access to the temple, Baruch reads the prophetic message in the temple on a holy day. Baruch never claims to be speaking for himself or even for Jeremiah; the message comes from God.

Read the story of Hananiah in Jeremiah 28. In what ways does this narrative reveal the principle revealed in Isaiah 8:20?

God's message does not flatter or bend to public opinion. It is not always, or even very often, "politically correct." Nor does God's message contradict itself; human interpretations of the message might be contradictory but never the message itself.

In Jeremiah 28:7–9, the prophet refers to the unity of Scripture built on the firm foundation of fulfilled prophecy. The false prophet's untimely death in this chapter vividly reinforces this important principle.

The point is that God has given us not only His Word but also very good reasons for trusting in that Word, even when we come to parts that we don't understand or sections that offend our sensibilities. The Bible doesn't save us, Jesus does; but He has revealed Himself to us more fully in the Scriptures than He has anywhere else.

There are many forces at work to weaken our trust in the Word of God. Identify some of those forces and ask yourself how you can protect yourself from them. After all, if we stop trusting in the messages of the Bible, what is left to trust in?

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1—Motivate**

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: God is trustworthy, especially during periods of upheaval and difficult circumstances.

Global newscasts daily remind viewers that the earth remains chaotic, unpredictable, and dangerous. Military invasions, collapsing financial institutions, widespread famine, nuclear proliferation, and other “headline grabbers” threaten life itself, leaving little room for complacency. Moral disintegration engulfs modern society while financial icebergs instill fear among international leaders. Is Jeremiah’s message, viewed through his associate’s eyes, ever more appropriate or timely?

Baruch served as Jeremiah’s scribe during the most chaotic period of Israel’s history. Everything was collapsing around them. Babylon crushed opposing nations like a steamroller crushes crackers. Judah likewise succumbed to Babylon’s military prowess. Apparently, Judah’s leaders were “doubting Thomases,” failing to believe that Jehovah was indeed trustworthy. Instead they invested their faith in political alliances with other nations, whose ability to defeat Babylon was roughly equal to the capability of ants to lift skyscrapers! During times of upheaval and difficult circumstances, personal or global, who receives our trust? Placing trust in ourselves, our interviewing skills, our political connections, our financial reserves probably demonstrate less intelligence than did Judah’s placement of trust in Egypt. However, beyond the troubled horizon, Jehovah remains secure, immovable, trustworthy, and intimately concerned about human trials and earthly conditions. Trusting Him is humanity’s most important decision today.

Opening Activity: Utilizing current newspapers, periodicals, and/or the Internet (supplemented by human memory), create a list of international troubles. Categories may include monetary, societal, ecological, familial, moral, and so on. Which deeper spiritual problems underlie these more visible surface problems?

Consider This: When physicians diagnose diseases, why is it more effective for them to treat the underlying causes for the symptoms rather than simply the symptoms? By the same token, why should government leaders, who focus on fixing problems, spend more time understanding the spiritual maladies that undergird our collapsing societies?

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Thwarted Ambitions *(Jeremiah 36)*

The seriousness of the situation finally seemed to be dawning on the people of Judah. In Jeremiah 36:9, the people gathered in the temple for a day of fasting before the Lord. Through his professional connections with other scribes, Baruch manages to secure a good public place, in the window of Gemariah at the entrance to the temple. Here Baruch proceeds to read the scroll that he has written at Jeremiah's dictation. After Baruch's reading of the message, court officials ask him to give them a private reading. After inquiries as to where the message has come from, the officials decide to bring it to the king's attention. For a brief moment it looks as if there might be change in Judah.

For Baruch this is a moment of hope. Should things turn around, then his support for Jeremiah will pay off. In the possible reformation he will be a man of importance, maybe elevated to a high position in the government.

What did the king's response mean to the future hopes of Baruch, at least on a professional level? *See Jeremiah 36.*

Scrolls were made of papyrus and were expensive. They had to be copied by hand. This made each scroll a scarce and precious resource. This particular scroll was God's message to King Jehoiakim. The king and his servants showed a deliberate insult to God by systematically cutting and burning the scroll. The burning of the scroll meant the loss of many hours of hard work by Baruch.

Baruch, who may have hoped for an honored position in court, now realizes that he has backed the "wrong" player and effectively sabotaged his future as a scribe at the royal court of Jerusalem. He also has angered the most powerful man in the kingdom. Here's a clear case where someone's stand for the Lord has cost him something.

Together with Jeremiah, Baruch is now a marked man. Royal agents comb the city, seeking to get hold of these "defeatists." Following God is no path for cowards or people who want to use God in order to make a nice career for themselves. Being God's messenger does not represent a life driven by personal ambition but rather involves letting God's will unfold in our lives, whatever the cost. At times that cost can be very great.

What has following the Lord cost you? When was the last time you had to lose or sacrifice something important to you because you stood for a biblical principle or for a commandment from God? Think through the implications of your answer.

Learning Cycle CONTINUED► **STEP 2—Explore****Bible Commentary****I. Baruch's World** (*Review Jeremiah 7:1–11 with your class.*)

Remembering how God has led in history is critically important. However, trusting in symbols embedded in that history—without a corresponding contemporary and dynamic relationship with God—is foolishness. Judah made this mistake. Their attitude was, “Consider this beautiful temple. Such grandeur clearly demonstrates divine favor toward us, Jehovah’s chosen nation. As long as we cling to this symbol, nothing threatens our security. Despite our wickedness, our depraved indifference to divine directives, our arrogant treatment of fellow Israelites, our self-centered pursuit of godless pleasure, God will protect and preserve our culture and national identity.” Jeremiah was commissioned to rebuke such complacency, and Baruch was designated as Jeremiah’s spokesperson. Caught in the political crossfire, Baruch faced an ominous decision between faithfulness to God and compromise for political expediency. Sound familiar?

Consider This: Before judging Israel for blasphemous arrogance, we should examine ourselves. What symbols of God’s past leading might we depend on instead of a living relationship with God? How have such catchphrases as “remnant church,” “three angels’ messages,” and “Spirit of Prophecy” become mere jargon, providing false security to a wayward generation? In what ways has the church become an institution defined by past experiences and symbols rather than by a living connection with the Eternal Father?

II. Thwarted Ambitions (*Review Jeremiah 36 with your class.*)

“In the OT the scribe first appears as a muster officer (Judg. 5:14). In the monarchical period (eleventh to tenth centuries B.C.), the scribe was a high cabinet officer concerned with finance, policy, and administration (2 Kings 22; Jer. 36:10). Jeremiah’s associate, Baruch, who recorded his words, was also a scribe (Jer. 36:32).”—Paul J. Achtemeier, ed., *The HarperCollins Bible Dictionary* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), p. 980. In ancient civilizations, when literacy was limited, scribes formed a significant and highly respected professional class. Their educational status and expertise in matters of economics, jurisprudence,

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Woe Is Me!

The Lord has a special message just for Baruch (*Jeremiah 45*). And no wonder, considering the circumstances.

First, the historical reference to the fourth year of Jehoiakim in *Jeremiah 45:1* puts chapter 45 after chapter 36. *Jeremiah* is most probably in prison, and the prospect of a revival among the leaders of Judah no longer seems probable. Second, Baruch's future, at least from an earthly perspective, seems bleak at best. Thus, as *Jeremiah 45:3* states, Baruch is having what might be called "a bad day."

Of course, feeling dejected, sad, or depressed is a natural part of our human existence on our fallen earth. There are many reasons for feeling this way, and one never should think that it's wrong or sinful to have these feelings. Depending upon the circumstances, it almost would seem inhuman not to have them. Certainly plenty of biblical characters had their moments of despair (*see 1 Kings 19:4; Job 6:2, 3; Ps. 55:4*). We fool ourselves if we think that somehow we are going to escape them ourselves.

Read *Isaiah 53:1–5*. What kind of mood and feelings are depicted here, and who is the one who is suffering these feelings? What should that tell us?

What's most important for us to remember during times of emotional distress and sadness is that this doesn't mean that God has forsaken us. It means only that, as with all fallen humanity, we will suffer in this life. Whether the suffering is our own fault or not doesn't, in one sense, matter. What matters is that we, amid our suffering, do not let the evil one use our grief to turn us away from the Lord or make us bitter and resentful against Him. What matters is that we claim God's promises of forgiveness, of healing, of a better future and a new life in a new heaven and a new earth.

We all long for things to go well; we all long for a better existence here and now. But often, given the nature of our world, that doesn't happen, or at least it doesn't happen as we imagine we would like it to. Hence, how important that, amid whatever we are going through, we don't forget the great hope that awaits us once the horrible experience of sin, suffering, and death is forever over.

What are some of your favorite Bible promises about the new heaven and new earth? Read through them, pray over them, and ask the Lord for the faith to hang on until the time when you, yourself, will be living in them.

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

government, and religion offered them a privileged place in society. Baruch's prospects were thus much higher than what average Jewish citizens might expect. His brother, Seraiah, was a staff officer in King Zedekiah's court (*Jer. 51:59*). This status suggests that Baruch's association with the political renegade Jeremiah may have been a personal spiritual decision. Apparently he, like Moses many generations before, refused the natural advantages of a royal court appointment, choosing instead "to share the oppression of God's people instead of enjoying the fleeting pleasures of sin" (*Heb. 11:25, NLT*). Such sacrifice is admirable anywhere but seems doubly virtuous during the disastrous final years of Judah's existence when security was scarce. His perceived betrayal of Judah in favor of Babylon served only to endanger his life.

Consider This: What level of spiritual resolve is necessary to swim upstream against popular opinion? How can Christians today prepare themselves for persecution and ridicule? How willing are we to sacrifice our earthly ambitions in favor of spiritual principles?

► **STEP 3—Apply**

Just for Teachers: Turmoil is woven throughout modern society. Without divine guidance, human wisdom has proved incapable of resolving national conflicts, personal loneliness, and a multitude of other contemporary dilemmas. Modern governments, however, seem determined to trust international associations, military strength, and psychological knowledge to provide solutions. Like King Asa, who trusted his foot disease to the physicians (and not to the Lord), humankind would rather self-medicate than acknowledge the futility of living without a Savior.

Activity:

Think about the following situation:

How much have you thought about the outrageousness of what we have to believe? Our whole faith hinges on something so antirational, so antiscientific, and so antiempirical that we have to leap across the accumulated knowledge of millennia in order to believe it.

We're talking about the resurrection of the world's dead. Billions and billions of people, many whose bodies have long been eaten and digested again and again by generations of worms, bugs, beasts, and bacteria, will live again? People whose molecules have been recycled,

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What Is in It for Me?

Read Jeremiah 45. What does this passage tell us about God? What does it tell us about Baruch?

Baruch is sad, in pain, restless, and worn out. Baruch sees all of his lifework being uprooted, all of his dreams vanishing like a mist.

God's heart is pained too. He has tenderly planted and watched over Israel. Like a parent agonizing over a stubborn, rebellious child, the Lord has warned and pleaded with His people for more than a thousand years. Baruch's pain and sadness are but a faint reflection of God's. Perhaps this is why God's heart always is touched by our sorrows. We never weep alone. The God who knows the "number of hairs" on our heads takes the time to address a despondent scribe and gives him hope and encouragement. In the judgment that was soon to fall on Israel, Baruch would be saved. God would preserve his life. The expression found in verse 5 ("thy life will I give thee for a prey") also can be found reflected in other parts of the book of Jeremiah (*Jer. 21:9, 38:2 and 39:18*). It evokes the figure of a soldier escaping with his life after a defeat in battle.

Paradoxically, salvation comes only through "defeat." It was in the humiliation and apparent defeat at the cross that Jesus won the victory. It is only as we are willing to stop fighting and surrender our lives, plans, and future to God that we can find security. It's when we are willing to totally surrender all that we become secure in the Lord.

What similarity can you note between Jeremiah 45:1–5 and Matthew 6:25–34?

In Jeremiah 45, God reminds Baruch of what really is important. In Matthew 6, Jesus reminds us that our lives are more important than our earthly possessions. For all his dreams of greatness, in the hour of disaster all that really mattered was Baruch's life. Ironically, even though Baruch missed out on a great future in the Jerusalem political scene because of his loyalty to Jeremiah, this connection really saved his life and gave him a far bigger legacy than anything he ever could have dreamed of.

It is this legacy that we have searched for in the shadow figures of the Old Testament that we have studied over the past 13 weeks. Most of the people we have gotten to know a little better were not the major power brokers of their particular time, but their names or titles have been recorded in Scripture so that we can learn from them, from both their successes and their failures.

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

reprocessed, and revamped into a thousand different incarnations—these people will be put back together into a living and conscious whole? Against all reason, against all experience, against all that we have ever seen or felt or could imagine, we have to believe this.

Why? Because without it our faith, our religion, everything we believe in and hope for, is, as Paul said, *mataios*, “useless” or “vain” (*1 Cor. 15:17*).

Thought Questions:

Whatever struggles you have, what are they in contrast to the resurrection of all the world’s dead? If your faith can reach far enough to believe that (and again, you have to believe in the resurrection of the dead or else you have nothing), then why can’t you trust God with your present trials? Whatever you’re facing, no matter how apparently insurmountable, what are they compared to the reconstruction to life (and for many to immortality) of dead billions of people? If you trust that God can do the latter, then why not trust Him with whatever’s raging in your life now?

► STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: Tomorrow the world celebrates the Messiah’s birth. Many will, ironically, observe it for the wrong reasons. Those who truly celebrate God’s unique entrance into earth are those who understand that Jesus is still the answer for today’s world. As the gospel chorus reminds us: “If we ever needed the Lord before, we sure do need Him now.” Baruch surely understood this need; otherwise he never would have sacrificed his position, embraced the lamenting prophet Jeremiah, and chosen righteous suffering above comfortable compliance.

In celebrating the Messiah’s matchless gift of life, may we exhibit trust without reservation, for the only gift that Jesus desires is the heart fully committed to Him.

Activity: Prepare small scrolls, wrapped in holiday ribbon or wrapping paper, with Bible promises written inside. Distribute them to class members and read them aloud. Invite members to share how particular promises have benefited their spiritual journey. The testimonies may reflect a personal fulfillment or a fulfillment for a friend or associate who in turn strengthened them. If possible close by singing “Jesus Is the Answer” (Andraé Crouch, composer) or a Christmas carol that focuses on the themes of surrendered lives and God’s providence.

Alternative Activity: This activity can be done without the visual aid of the scrolls. Simply invite members to share how particular promises have benefited their spiritual journey.

Further Study: “Taking another roll, Jeremiah gave it to Baruch, ‘who wrote therein from the mouth of Jeremiah all the words of the book which Jehoiakim king of Judah had burned in the fire: and there were added besides unto them many like words.’ Verses 28, 32. The wrath of man had sought to prevent the labors of the prophet of God; but the very means by which Jehoiakim had endeavored to limit the influence of the servant of Jehovah, gave further opportunity for making plain the divine requirements.

“The spirit of opposition to reproof, that led to the persecution and imprisonment of Jeremiah, exists today. Many refuse to heed repeated warnings, preferring rather to listen to false teachers who flatter their vanity and overlook their evil-doing. In the day of trouble such will have no sure refuge, no help from heaven. God’s chosen servants should meet with courage and patience the trials and sufferings that befall them through reproach, neglect, and misrepresentation. They should continue to discharge faithfully the work God has given them to do, ever remembering that the prophets of old and the Saviour of mankind and His apostles also endured abuse and persecution for the Word’s sake.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 437.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ What is our understanding of how inspiration works? How has the life and ministry of Ellen G. White helped us understand this important topic?
- ❷ What biblical characters had their personal ambitions thwarted because they remained faithful to the Lord?
- ❸ In class, talk about what things people have had to give up in order to stand for the Lord. What can you learn from one another’s stories? Ask whether anyone thought what it cost to serve the Lord wasn’t worth what the person has received in return.
- ❹ How do you respond when reproofed for wrong actions? Are you more likely to repent on your knees or, figuratively speaking, cast the reproof in a fire and seek to imprison the messenger? What does your answer tell you about yourself and what you need to change?
- ❺ How can we better understand that just because we are suffering (even as a direct result of our sins), this doesn’t mean that the Lord has forsaken us? How can we learn to hold on to our faith while going through tremendous pain?