

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?

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?

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, whatever it is.

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.

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.

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:

- 1 What is our understanding of how inspiration works? How has the life and ministry of Ellen G. White helped us understand this important topic?
- 2 What biblical characters had their personal ambitions thwarted because they remained faithful to the Lord?
- 3 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.
- 4 How do you respond when reproved 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?
- 5 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?

The Invitation

by DALTON SWARAY

I live in Sierra Leone in western Africa. I grew up in a non-Christian religion with strict rules. My mother would punish me if I didn't observe the specified times of prayer each day. When I grew up a bit, I asked her what good it did to repeat prayers in a language I didn't understand. I wanted to know God personally. She understood and allowed me to search for my own faith.

I attended some evangelistic meetings in my area just to see what they were about. I was amazed. People gave testimonies and sang such great songs. That day a desire was born in my heart to become a Christian.

I studied at a Christian high school. By this time I believed that God created the world and that Jesus Christ died for sinners. I knew that the Bible was the Christians' holy book, but I seldom saw anyone at school reading it. I wasn't sure that this church was the true way to God.

Then I met Giba, a childhood friend whom I hadn't seen for a long time. We talked for a while; then he invited me to attend evangelistic meetings at his church. "God loves you," he said. "He wants you in His fold. Please come." I didn't go, but I felt restless. Finally I visited Giba's church on Sabbath morning.

It was different from any Christian worship service I'd seen. After a mission story the congregation divided into groups to discuss a Bible topic from a book they had. I wanted to know more. I received a lesson quarterly before I left and studied it at home. Every point was supported by Bible texts.

I continued to attend the Adventist church and compared what they taught with what I had learned elsewhere. I wondered why Adventists worship on Saturday, but as I studied the Bible I discovered that God hadn't changed His holy day; men had.

As I studied the Bible, I realized that I didn't choose God; God chose me.

Giba and I studied together, and he helped me understand God's Word. Sadly, he died before I was baptized. But his ministry continues. Giba invited me to meet God, and now I am inviting my friends as well. One of my friends has been baptized, and we are working together to bring others. My greatest desire is to lead my parents to God's wonderful family.

Your mission offerings helped me answer God's invitation to follow Him. Thank you so much!

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Next quarter's Bible study guide, *Jesus Wept: The Bible and Human Emotions*, by Julian Melgosa, will look at human emotions and will give us biblical principles on how we can understand our emotions and seek the power of the Lord to bring them under His loving sovereignty. It's our prayer that these lessons will, in the context of understanding our emotions, help us reach out to the Lord, who has bestowed on us the greatest emotion of all: love. No matter what our emotional ups and downs are, may each of us learn to bask in that love, especially in the down times, and then through God's grace reflect that love to others. In the end, no matter what our sorrows, "love never fails" (*1 Cor. 13:8, NKJV*).

Lesson 1—Emotions

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **Negative Emotions** (*2 Samuel 13*)

MONDAY: **Positive Emotions** (*Col. 3:12–14*)

TUESDAY: **Jesus' Emotional Manifestations: Part 1** (*Mark 8:1–3*)

WEDNESDAY: **Jesus' Emotional Manifestations: Part 2** (*Luke 19:41–44*)

THURSDAY: **God's Plan for Painful Emotions** (*John 16:20–24*)

Memory Text—*John 16:20*

Sabbath Gem: Emotions are a vital part of our personalities. They can play an important part in our overall well-being. How important it is then to examine our emotions and how they impact our lives.

Lesson 2—Divine Provision for Anxiety

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **The First Fearful Experience** (*Gen. 3:6–10*)

MONDAY: **Do Not Be Afraid** (*Gen. 15:1–3*)

TUESDAY: **Trust Against Anxiety** (*John 14:1, 2*)

WEDNESDAY: **Of Birds and Lilies** (*Matt. 6:25–33*)

THURSDAY: **One Day at a Time** (*Matt. 6:34*)

Memory Text—*1 Peter 5:7*

Sabbath Gem: Through divine power we can have relief from fear and anxiety. Trust in God and contentment are key factors in looking at the future with confidence.

Lessons for the Visually Impaired: The regular *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* is available free each month in braille and on audiocassette to sight-impaired and physically handicapped persons who cannot read normal ink print. This includes individuals who, because of arthritis, multiple sclerosis, paralysis, accident, and so forth, cannot hold or focus on normal ink-print publications. Contact Christian Record Services, Box 6097, Lincoln, NE 68506-0097.