

Baruch: Building a Legacy¹ in a World That Is Falling Apart



SABBATH—DECEMBER 18

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Isaiah 53:1–5; Jeremiah 7:1–11; Jeremiah 28; Jeremiah 45; Matthew 6:25–34.

MEMORY VERSE: “To the law and to the testimony [words of God]! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them” (Isaiah 8:20, NKJV).

THE WORLD DURING THE TIME OF BARUCH² seemed to be coming to an end. Jerusalem and Judah were in their last moments of history. Assyria had controlled the Near East for more than two hundred years. But it had been weakened by a civil war. It was losing control over its enslaved states. Meanwhile, a new superpower was on the rise: Babylon. For a time, Judah had some peace under good king Josiah (640–609 B.C.). The nation was able to make its territory grow. It renewed its dedication to the worship of the true God. But changes were happening fast at the end of the seventh century B.C., and time was running out for Jerusalem. King Josiah died in battle against the Egyptians (2 Kings 23:29). His sons ruled after him, but they did not have the same power that their father had. They made the fatal mistake of rebelling against Babylon. As a result, Babylon captured Jerusalem and destroyed the temple in 586 B.C. Many people of Judah were captured and made slaves.

Baruch lived during this time of great change and loss. Baruch's world was crumbling (falling apart). But he left a legacy (gift) that no king or war could destroy.

What can we learn from Baruch, our last background character³ in the Bible?

1. legacy—something (such as land or money or even a chance for hope or a better future) that is received from, or left by, someone who has died.

2. Baruch—Jeremiah's scribe (secretary).

3. background character—a person in a story, book, or play who is not the most important character (person).

SUNDAY—DECEMBER 19

**BARUCH'S WORLD
(Jeremiah 7:1–11)**

To understand Baruch's world, we must understand the certain political, economic, and religious situations that controlled his nation. The country of Judah was under the control of Babylon. The strong feelings people had against Babylon were felt in all areas of society. People wanted to be free. Economically, things were going well. At least for some. Some of the Jewish people had grown richer by taking advantage of the poor.



In the time of Baruch, Judah was under the control of Babylonian power.

Read Jeremiah 7:1–11. What are some of the serious moral⁴ and spiritual problems the people were warned about? What can we learn from them for ourselves and our time? Give special attention to verse 4. What were the people being told, and what lesson can we learn from that for ourselves?

Baruch's name means "one who is blessed." And Baruch does seem blessed. He was a scribe (secretary), which meant that he was a very educated man. He seems to have come from a family of scribes. And his family had good connections during these difficult times.

We do not know exactly how Baruch was hired to be a scribe for the priest and prophet Jeremiah. Perhaps he was interested in Jeremiah because of the strong connection Jeremiah had to God. What Jeremiah preaches is rooted firmly in God's Word. Jeremiah is not afraid of standing up for the Word of God, even when it may be difficult or dangerous. Through his visions,⁵ Jeremiah gains a special understanding of the weakness of the government his society trusts. The Lord called Jeremiah to warn the people about their actions. Their actions would lead to Judah's downfall if the people did not change their ways. Perhaps it was a desire to be a part of this change that led Baruch to his special work.

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

4. moral—concerning or relating to what is right and wrong in the behavior of people.

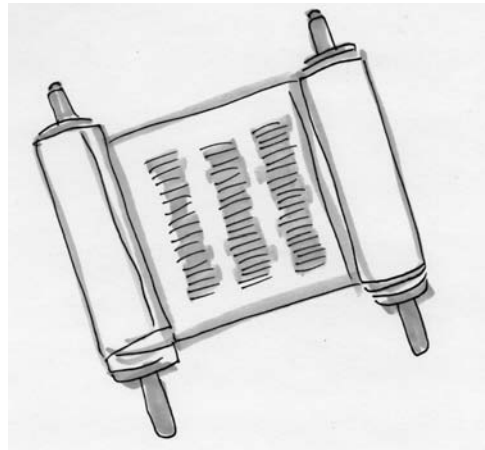
5. visions—special messages from God that are seen in the mind or in a dream or in a trance to help a person know God's will (plan).

MONDAY—DECEMBER 20

**JEREMIAH'S SCRIBE
(SECRETARY) (Jeremiah 28)**

The book of Jeremiah gives us a special look at how the Bible is written. Baruch, Jeremiah's scribe, is really taking part in the writing and recording of the Word of God. In Jeremiah 36:4, Jeremiah calls Baruch. As he speaks a message to the people, Baruch writes it all down on a parchment scroll.⁶ This is an excellent example of how inspiration⁷ works. God does not take control of the prophet Jeremiah's body and move his hand as he writes. Instead, God gives Jeremiah visions and messages. Normally, the prophet would then put the message into words and write it down. But in this case, Jeremiah spoke to Baruch, who wrote it down for him. Baruch also communicates (speaks) the message in public. Because Jeremiah is not popular with the court, he is not allowed to enter the temple. So, it is Baruch who reads the prophetic (from God) 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 story show the principle (rule; guideline) revealed in Isaiah 8:20?



As Jeremiah speaks, Baruch copies down the message on a parchment scroll.

God's message does not flatter or follow public opinion. It is not always "politically correct." God's message never disagrees with itself. Our explanations of God's message might disagree. But even if we cannot explain it, God's message is still the truth.

In Jeremiah 28:7–9, the prophet speaks of the unity (oneness) of the Bible built on the firm foundation (basis) of fulfilled prophecy.⁸ The false prophet's early death in this chapter supports this important principle.

The most important thing to remember is that God has given us both His Word and very good reasons for trusting that Word. Sometimes we come to parts that we do not understand or parts that insult our feelings. But the Bible does not save us. Jesus does. Jesus has shown Himself to us more fully in the Bible than He has anywhere else.

6. parchment scroll—a roll of pressed flax (paper) used in Jeremiah's time for keeping records.

7. inspiration—God's message given to people.

8. prophecy—a special message from God, often an explanation of what will happen in the future.

Lesson 13 BARUCH: BUILDING A LEGACY IN A WORLD THAT IS FALLING APART

There are many things at work to weaken our trust in the Word of God. Name some of those things and ask yourself how you can protect yourself from them. If we stop trusting in the messages of the Bible, what is left for us to trust?

TUESDAY—DECEMBER 21

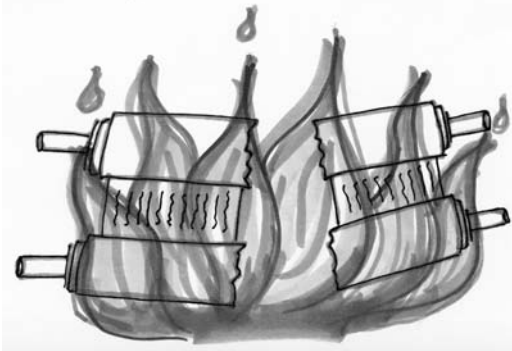
FRUSTRATED AMBITIONS (DESIRE FOR POWER OR GAIN) (Jeremiah 36)

The people of Judah now seem to understand how serious their situation is. In Jeremiah 36:9, the people meet in the temple for a day of fasting before the Lord. Through his connections with other scribes, Baruch is able to get a good public place. This is in the window of Gemariah at the entrance to the temple. Here, Baruch reads the scroll of Jeremiah's message that Baruch has written down. After his reading of the message, court officials ask Baruch to give them a private reading. After asking questions about where the message came from, the officials decide to tell the king about it. For a moment, it seems that there will be change in Judah.

This is a moment of hope for Baruch. If things turn around, then his support for Jeremiah will pay off. When things change, Baruch will become an important man. Maybe he will be promoted to a high position in the government.

What did the king's answer mean to Baruch and his professional hopes? Read Jeremiah 36.

Scrolls were made of papyrus⁹ and were expensive. All of the writing on them had to be done by hand. This made each scroll expensive and valuable. This special scroll was God's message to King Jehoiakim. When the king and his servants cut and burned the scroll, they showed a clear insult to God. The burning of the scroll meant the loss of many hours of hard work by Baruch.



The king and his servants showed a clear and deliberate insult to God by cutting and burning the scroll.

Baruch may have hoped for an honored position in court. But now he realizes that he has supported the “wrong” player. He also has ruined his future as a scribe at the royal court of Jerusalem. He has made the most powerful man in the kingdom (the king) angry. This is a clear case where making a stand for the Lord costs somebody a lot.

9. papyrus—a tall plant that is like grass and grows in marshes, especially in Egypt; paper made from papyrus was used in Bible times.

Lesson 13 BARUCH: BUILDING A LEGACY IN A WORLD THAT IS FALLING APART

Jeremiah and Baruch are now marked men. The spies of the king go through the city, trying to capture these “enemies” (Jeremiah and Baruch). We can see that following God is no path for cowards or people who want to use God to make a nice career for themselves. Being God’s messenger is not about getting ahead in life. Instead, it involves letting the will of God 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 (give up) something important to you because you stood up for a Bible principle or for a commandment from God? Think about what your answer may cost you.

WEDNESDAY—DECEMBER 22

WOE IS ME! (Isaiah 53:1–5)

The Lord has a special message just for Baruch (Jeremiah 45). This is no surprise after all that has happened.

Jeremiah 45:1 mentions the fourth year of Jehoiakim. This means that chapter 45 takes place after chapter 36. Jeremiah is probably in prison. And the hope for a reform (change for the better) among the leaders of Judah no longer seems possible. Baruch’s future also seems hopeless. As we see in Jeremiah 45:3, Baruch is having what might be called a bad day.

Of course, feeling sad or depressed is a natural part of our human life

on our fallen earth. There are many reasons for feeling this way. So, we should never think that it is wrong or sinful to have these feelings. There are some situations in which it would seem almost inhuman not to have them. Plenty of Bible characters had their moments of depression (sadness and hopelessness) (see 1 Kings 19:4; Job 6:2, 3; Psalm 55:4). We fool ourselves if we think that, somehow, we are going to escape these feelings ourselves.

Read Isaiah 53:1–5. What kind of mood and feelings are shown in these verses? Who is the one who is suffering these feelings? What should that tell us?

It is very important for us to remember that even during times of great sadness, God has not forgotten us. It only means that we are suffering in this life the way all people do. It does not matter if the suffering is our own fault or not. What is important is that we do not let Satan use our grief to turn us away from the Lord.

We all want things to go well. We all want a better life, here and now. But sometimes, because our world is full of sin, this does not happen. At least, it does not happen as we would like it to. So, it is important that we do not forget the great hope that is waiting for us once the horrible experience of sin, suffering, and death is removed forever.

What are some of your favorite Bible promises about the new heaven and new earth? Read through them and pray over them.

Then ask the Lord for the faith to hang on until the time when you, yourself, will be living in them.

THURSDAY—DECEMBER 23

**WHAT IS IN IT FOR ME?
(Jeremiah 45)**

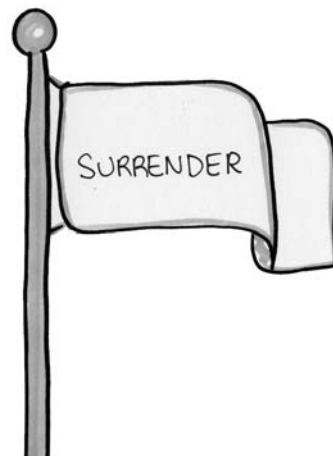
Read Jeremiah 45. What does this chapter tell us about God? What does it tell us about Baruch?

Baruch is sad, in pain, restless, and worn out. Baruch sees all of his work being uprooted. All of his dreams are vanishing like a mist (fog).

God's heart is pained too. With love God has planted and watched over Israel. Like a parent worrying over a stubborn, rebellious (warring) child, the Lord has warned and pleaded with His people for more than a thousand years. In a small way, the pain and sadness of Baruch show us the pain and sadness of God. Perhaps this is why God's heart always is touched by our sorrows. We never weep (cry) alone. The God who knows the "number of hairs" on our heads takes the time to speak to a sad scribe and gives him hope and encouragement. In the judgment that was soon to fall on Israel, Baruch would be saved. God would save his life. The wording found in verse 5, ("thy life will I give thee for a prey [gift]") also can be found in other parts of the book of Jeremiah (Jeremiah 21:9; Jeremiah 38:2; and Jeremiah 39:18). It shows

the picture of a soldier escaping with his life after a defeat (loss) in battle.

Salvation¹⁰ comes only through "defeat." It was in the humbling "defeat" at the cross that Jesus won the victory. If we are willing to stop fighting and surrender (give completely) our lives, plans, and future to God, then we can find security (safety and peace). It is when we are willing to fully surrender that we become safe in the Lord.



When we are willing to stop fighting and surrender our lives, plans, and future to God, then we will find peace and safety.

What truths do Jeremiah 45:1–5 and Matthew 6:25–34 share?

In Jeremiah 45, God reminds Baruch of what is really important. In Matthew 6, Jesus reminds us that our lives are more important than the things we own on earth. Baruch had dreams of greatness, but all that was really important was his life. Baruch missed out on a great future in Jerusalem politics because of his loyalty to Jeremiah. But

¹⁰ salvation—God's plan for saving sinners from eternal (without end) death; the gift of eternal life; being saved from sin or evil.

Lesson 13 BARUCH: BUILDING A LEGACY IN A WORLD THAT IS FALLING APART

in the end this connection saved his life and gave him a far better legacy (future) than anything he could have dreamed of.

It is this legacy (gift) that we have searched for in the shadow figures (not-so-well-known people) of the Old Testament that we have studied over the past 13 weeks. Most of the people we have gotten to know were not the important people in their times. But their names or titles have been recorded in the Bible so that we can learn from them, from both their successes and their failures.

FRIDAY—DECEMBER 24

ADDITIONAL STUDY: “The spirit of rebellion [fighting] against warnings from God led the king to put Jeremiah in prison. That spirit is still around today. Many refuse to listen to warnings that have been given time after time. They choose to listen to false teachers who flatter them and their foolish desires and plans. They choose to overlook their own sins. In the day of trouble these people will have no sure safety, no help from heaven. God’s chosen servants should meet with courage and patience the hardships and sufferings. These difficulties will be caused by being criticized, feeling rejected, unwanted, unloved, and misunderstood. God’s people should continue to do faithfully the work God has given them to do. As they do it, they should remember that the prophets of old and the Saviour

of man [Jesus] and His apostles also suffered through abuse and torture for the Word’s sake.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, page 437.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① What is our understanding of how inspiration works? How has the life and ministry (work done for God) of Ellen G. White helped us understand this?
- ② What Bible characters had their ambitions frustrated because they remained faithful to the Lord?
- ③ In class, talk about the things people have had to give up to be on the Lord’s side. What can you learn from one another’s stories? Ask if anyone thinks or feels that what it cost them to serve the Lord was not worth what the person has received in return.
- ④ How do you answer when scolded for wrong actions? Are you more likely to repent¹¹ on your knees, or throw the criticism into the fire and try to “imprison” and blame the messenger? What does your answer tell you about yourself and what you need to change?
- ⑤ How can we better understand that even though we are suffering (even from our sins), it does not mean that the Lord has forgotten us? How can we learn to hold on to our faith while going through great pain?

11. repent—to say you are sorry for sinning and to turn away from sin with the help of the Holy Spirit.