

## ***Background Characters in the Old Testament***

### ***Baruch: Building a Legacy in a Crumbling World***

Lesson #13 for December 25, 2010

Scriptures: Isaiah 53:1-5; Jeremiah 7:1-11; 28; 32; 36; 43; 45; Matthew 6:25-34.

1. This lesson focuses on the lives of Jeremiah and Baruch who lived and worked in a very troubled time in the history of Judah. The northern kingdom of Israel had already disappeared into Assyrian captivity (723/722 BC). But, by Jeremiah's time, the nation of Assyria was falling apart because of civil war.
2. A new superpower, Babylon, was rising in the east. Jeremiah was prophesying total destruction of the nation of Judah, and Baruch as his secretary/scribe was writing it all down. Baruch is mentioned only in four chapters: Jeremiah 32, 36, 43, and 45. But, for reasons that we do not fully understand, the book of Jeremiah is not in chronologic order. Look at the following chronology and you will get some idea of how mixed up the book is.
3. During the reign of: **Manasseh** (696/695-642 B.C.): Jeremiah born about 645 B.C.
  - Amon** (642-640 B.C.): Jeremiah still a child
  - Josiah** (640-609 B.C.): Jeremiah 1-6; 14-16
  - Jehoahaz** (609 B.C.): Reigned only three months.
  - Jehoiakim** (609-598 B.C.): Jeremiah 17; 7-11; 26; 35; 22:1-19; 25; 18-20; 36:1-4; 45; 36:5-32; 12. (Jerusalem was first conquered in 606/605 B.C.)
  - Jehoiachin** (598-597 B.C.): Jeremiah 22:20-30; 13; 23. (Before second conquest)
  - Zedekiah** (597-586 B.C.): Jeremiah 24; 29-31; 46-51; 27; 28; 21; 34; 32; 33; 37-39.
  - After the final destruction of Jerusalem** (586/585 B.C.): Jeremiah 40-44; 52.
  - Jeremiah died:** Sometime around 580 B.C. (See *4SDABC*, p. 348)
4. During Jeremiah and Baruch's childhood, good King Josiah raised Judah's hopes temporarily until he died in a battle as he was unnecessarily fighting the Egyptians. (609 B.C.; 2 Kings 23:29) Shortly thereafter, Judah was conquered for the first time by King Nebuchadnezzar in 606/605 B.C. and Daniel and his three friends were taken off to Babylon. That was followed six or seven years later by another conquest at which time most of the population along with the prophet Ezekiel was taken into Babylonian captivity. (598/597 B.C.)
5. Approximately 11 years later, Nebuchadnezzar went back a third time and completely destroyed Jerusalem—including Solomon's famous temple—after sieging Jerusalem for approximately 2½ years. (588-586 B.C.) During that time, portions of the book of Jeremiah and the book of Lamentations were written. We do not know if Baruch assisted Jeremiah in recording the book of Lamentations or even if Baruch was in Jerusalem. He appears to have been from an influential and well-educated family who had worked for the king.
6. From the above we can see that chronologically, Jeremiah 36:1-4 is the first reference to Baruch. We do not know how long it took Baruch to write out the prophecies of Jeremiah.
7. Apparently, somewhere near the end of that writing process, we have the story found in Jeremiah 45. Then, the rest of the experience of Jeremiah 36 was told.

8. Later, Baruch assisted Jeremiah to purchase a piece of land in his home village of Anathoth at a time when Anathoth was already under the control of the Babylonians.
9. Even later, Jeremiah and Baruch were forced to go with a group of renegade Judeans to Egypt where probably both of them eventually died.
10. Jeremiah and Baruch lived in Palestine at a time that was dominated by Babylonian conquests, war, uncertainty, and chaos—religious, social, political and economic chaos.
11. Read Jeremiah 7:1-11. What do we learn from these verses about the attitude of the people early in Baruch’s experience? Jehoiakim was king. The rich were abusing the poor, the widows, and the orphans. People were going back and forth between worshiping several fertility-cult “gods” and going to the temple in Jerusalem to worship *Yahweh*. Right within the city of Jerusalem, they were building fires and “baking cakes” to the goddess, Queen of Heaven! (Jeremiah 7:16-18) This goddess of fertility, of maternity, of sexual love, and of war was worshiped in rites of a grossly immoral and debasing character. God said, “Don’t even pray for these people, Jeremiah!” Read on to see God’s incredible statements about them.
12. One of the most amazing aspects of their attitude is found in Jeremiah 7:4. Even though they were sinning right and left, they believed that God would protect them because Solomon’s Temple was there! They thought that surely, God would not allow anyone to destroy Solomon’s Temple! Did they think that they had God over a barrel?
13. Do we ever suggest that because we belong to “God’s true church” and have “the third angel’s message” and the “Spirit of Prophecy” and have “present truth,” we are safe?
14. Baruch and his brother Seraiah (Jeremiah 43:3; Jeremiah 51:59) very likely belonged to a family of well-known scribes who worked for the king. They were well-educated and held prominent positions. At some time, Baruch must have decided to leave government employment and join Jeremiah. Why do you suppose he would do that? Was he disgusted by what was going on in the government? Did he believe that Jeremiah was truly inspired by God? Had they become good personal friends? Do we need to do something in our day?
15. Read Jeremiah 36:1-4. These verses give us some interesting insights into the process of inspiration. God did not dictate to Jeremiah who wrote down word-for-word what God said to him. Instead, God gave visions and dreams to Jeremiah who then described what he had seen in the best terms he could to his friend Baruch while Baruch was busy writing down Jeremiah’s words. What does this tell us about the process of inspiration?
16. Read Jeremiah 45 (Baruch wanted to give up; so, God sent him a special testimony!) and then Jeremiah 36:5-26. What happened to the scroll that Baruch had written? Remember that writing material in those days was very expensive. It was made either from skins or from papyrus which had been carefully processed so that it could be used as writing material. Everything had to be written in longhand. We do not know exactly how many “pages” of material Baruch wrote down, but it must have taken Jeremiah and Baruch a considerable period of time to complete it.
17. Then, for reasons which we perhaps do not fully understand, Jeremiah was banned from going to the temple. (Jeremiah 36:5) Therefore, he instructed Baruch to carry the scroll to the temple and read it to the people gathered there. Baruch was allowed to read Jeremiah’s messages from a prominent place near the gate of the temple. Did the leaders know that

those were the words of God through Jeremiah?

18. Baruch may have seen that as an opportunity to promote himself and Jeremiah into more influential positions in the nation. But, little seemed to change. Near the end of the following year—the ninth month of the fifth year of King Jehoiakim—the people were apparently beginning to realize the seriousness of their situation. A fast was called to be held at the temple in Jerusalem.
19. Jeremiah recognized that many people would be going to Jerusalem for this special fast. As a result, he asked Baruch to go once again to the temple and read his materials. Baruch made arrangements to read the document from a window in a prominent place in a room used by Gemariah, grandson of Shaphan, the court secretary. His room was in the upper court near the entrance of the new gate of the temple. This meant that many of the people who came to the temple would hear Baruch reading. Gemariah reported to government officials what he had heard being read. In turn, those officials asked Baruch to read it to them. When they heard the message, they wanted to know if it had come from Jeremiah; and then they insisted that the king be told. They also recognized the hazards that might result to Baruch and Jeremiah, and they told them to go hide. Jehudi took the scroll from Baruch and read it to the king.
20. To keep himself warm during the winter, the king was sitting near a fire. After Jehudi had read three or four columns of the papyrus scroll, the king would cut those columns off with his knife and throw them into the fire. Some of the officials begged the king not to do that, but he paid no attention to them. Furthermore, the king asked the officials to arrest Jeremiah and Baruch. But, Jeremiah and Baruch could not be found.
21. Jeremiah and Baruch were instructed by the Lord to rewrite out the portions that had been burned, and they added a lot more. Does that explain the confusion in the order of the book of Jeremiah? Did they write out each section when they remembered it? Serving the Lord, especially when it involves giving warnings because of sins being committed, is not popular or politically correct! Jeremiah and Baruch's lives were in danger. But, God hid them. Are we prepared to stand up for the truth even at the risk of our lives? Does serving the Lord cost us anything?
22. Read Jeremiah 45. What can we learn from that short exchange between God, Jeremiah, and Baruch? Do we ever feel discouraged as Baruch did? We have been promised that those who live in the final days of this earth's history will have their lives preserved in times of great trouble and distress. God is always seeking to care for His children. But, God does not promise that they will never have any trials or temptations!
23. Can you name other biblical characters who apparently had moments of despair? (Jeremiah 4:19) What about Elijah (1 Kings 19:4)? Job (Job 6:2,3)? David (Psalm 55:4)? Even Jesus (Isaiah 53:1-5)? People still think that God was punishing Jesus. Emotions form an important part of every person's life. They are intended to help us make life more interesting. But, God never promised that all our emotions would be positive. We must not allow circumstances to completely control our emotions. We must be in charge of them.
24. Even when we may feel abandoned by our friends and perhaps even by God, we must remember that God never leaves us. God has wonderful plans for His righteous children. Think of some of your favorite Bible promises. Think of them when you are discouraged,

despondent, or depressed. We must never allow circumstances to control us.

25. Is there any limit to God's power? Think of what an incredible thing it is to believe that God will resurrect every single person who has ever lived! (John 5:25,28,29) If God can do all of that, what possible trouble in your life could He not deal with?
26. Try to imagine yourself living through the siege of Jerusalem. How did Jeremiah and Baruch find food to eat? (See Lamentations) Did they constantly need to be hiding from the king and his officials? Some time later, the king secretly called Jeremiah out of prison to ask him what was going to happen! Then, he told Jeremiah not to tell anyone! (Jeremiah 38:14-28)
27. Incredible as it may seem, when Jerusalem was finally destroyed, Baruch and Jeremiah were preserved. The Babylonians gave them the choice of remaining in Jerusalem or going to Babylon. They chose to remain in Jerusalem.
28. The Scriptures mention two more times when Baruch was involved in the ministry of Jeremiah. Those are not mentioned in the *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*.
29. Jeremiah was instructed by the Lord to purchase a piece of property in his hometown of Anathoth, a mere three miles from Jerusalem which was under seige, even though Anathoth had been conquered already by the Babylonians. (Jeremiah 32:1-9) This was a lesson in trusting God that one day the land would come back to them. Jeremiah asked Baruch to assist in the processing of that official transaction. (Jeremiah 32:10-15)
30. Read Jeremiah 43:1-3. Some years later after asking Jeremiah to inquire of the Lord about what to do, (Jeremiah 42:1-6) the military leaders waited for Jeremiah's response. Ten days later after praying to God, Jeremiah received His answer. (Jeremiah 42:7-22) Instead of believing Jeremiah's words, they accused him of being influenced by Baruch! Does that remind anyone of accusations made against our modern prophet?
31. The end of the story of Baruch is told in Jeremiah 51 and Jeremiah 42-44. Jeremiah and Baruch were forced to travel with the group of rebels to Egypt where they lived for some time and later died.
32. What can we learn about God from the story of Baruch? One thing is certain; even in very difficult times, God never abandons us. When appropriate, God interacts with His children on a very personal basis. Even when God's children are terribly misbehaving, He still cares about them. God communicates with His children through prophets who sometimes are assisted by secretaries/scribes. Those messages must then be written down, copied in some cases, translated into various languages, and then read and understood by people like us. Inspiration is not complete until God's message has entered our minds and has been comprehended.
33. Similar to Jeremiah and Baruch, some of us may be privileged to live through some very difficult times at the end of this earth's history. Have we faced anything like Baruch faced? But, instead of dying in Egypt, those who live through that terrible final time of earth's history will be able to look up into the clouds and see the Son of Man coming in all His glory.

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