

Baruch

The Point: God will reward your faithful service.

Session Passages: Jeremiah 36:4-8,16-18; 45:1-5

Jeremiah 36:4-8

Connection to The Point. God gave Jeremiah the words which Baruch wrote down and then read publicly at the temple.

The setting. Jeremiah's ministry as prophet to Judah, the Southern Kingdom, spanned more than forty years. His father (Hilkiah) served as a priest and lived in Anathoth (Jer. 1:1). The Lord called Jeremiah to serve Him in the thirteenth year of the reign of King Josiah (627 or 626 BC) and remained active under several kings including Jehoahaz II (609 BC), Jehoiakim (608-598 BC), Jehoiachin (598-597 BC), and Zedekiah (597-586 BC). Jeremiah would continue his wearisome ministry until after the siege and fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians in 586 BC.

The events of chapter 36 occurred near the time of the first Babylonian invasion (605 BC) when Daniel and other captives were taken to Babylon during the fourth year of Jehoiakim's reign. Interestingly, Jeremiah mentioned Jehoiakim's father, Josiah, who when he heard the word of God proclaimed, tore his clothes in repentance, initiating a great revival (2 Kings 22:1–23:25). God commanded Jeremiah to record the words He had spoken to him from the beginning of his ministry during the reign of Josiah and spanning some twenty-three years. God had an express purpose in this scroll: that Judah would repent from their sinful ways (Jer. 36:1-3).

Baruch the son of Neriah (v. 4). Introduced here as Jeremiah's scribe, Baruch's first appearance in the book described him helping Jeremiah purchase a field from the prophet's cousin (32:12). He worked as Jeremiah's scribe or secretary from at least 605 BC until after the fall of Jerusalem in 587 BC. Apparently the grandson of Massaiah, a governor of Jerusalem during the Josiah's reign, Baruch hailed from a noble family. Yet he willingly served in a secondary yet influential role in Jeremiah's ministry as he remained deeply committed to the Lord.

At Jeremiah's dictation While Jeremiah dictated Wrote from the mouth of Jeremiah (v. 4). Jeremiah chose to record the words God had given him by enlisting Baruch to serve as his personal secretary. Baruch wrote on a scroll what Jeremiah dictated.

All the words the LORD had spoken to Jeremiah him All the words of the LORD, which he had spoken unto him (v. 4). God used human instruments—Jeremiah dictating to Baruch—to preserve His words to the people. God had miraculously guided the prophet's thoughts and words as Jeremiah had proclaimed God's messages earlier. God's Spirit inspired Jeremiah as he spoke the words of the messages to Baruch while the prophet's own personality, thought patterns, and vocabulary came through his choice of words. Baruch wrote on the scroll. What Jeremiah spoke and Baruch wrote down came miraculously through the Holy Spirit who inspired His Word (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:20-21).

"I am restricted; I cannot enter the temple of the LORD I am not allowed to go to the LORD'S temple am shut up; I cannot go into the house of the LORD (v. 5). Jeremiah called attention to his prohibition to go to the temple. He gave no reasons for his restriction. Possibilities range from the priests' hostile reaction to Jeremiah's speech at the temple (Jer. 26:1-9) to something more pragmatic such as being ceremonially unclean. However, the increased animosity between the temple officials and the prophet, whom they considered a troublemaker, points to the former. While Jeremiah could not go to the temple, he could still hear from God and record it through Baruch. The Word of God itself has power.

"You must go and read from the scroll Go . . . and read to the people from the scroll" Go thou, and read in the roll (v. 6). Baruch would have known he risked his career, and possibly his life, by reading publicly what he had written from Jeremiah's dictation.

"In the hearing of the people at the temple of the LORD on a day of fasting On a day of fasting and read to the people from the scroll the words of the LORD" In the ears of the people in the LORD'S house upon the fasting day (v. 6). Jeremiah chose a *fasting* day when a larger number of people would have gathered for sacrifices and prayers. At this time of Judah's history, there were no standing fast

days other than the one associated with the Day of Atonement. With the Babylonian army marching against the city, Jehoiakim likely had called for a day of fasting to rouse the people to a holy war against their enemies. God purposed that the words of the scroll be heard on this day of fasting when people would have a more teachable heart and might more readily acknowledge their sins and submit to Him.

“Read his words in the hearing of all the Judeans who are coming from their cities Read them to all the people of Judah who come in from their towns” Read them in the ears of all Judah that come out of their cities (v. 6). If the people ever needed to hear from God, the timing could not have been more appropriate. Therefore, Jeremiah reiterated his instruction to Baruch to read the prophecy.

“Perhaps their petition will come before the Lord Perhaps they will bring their petition before the Lord” It may be they will present their supplication before the Lord (v. 7). Literally, “supplication shall fall” alluding to the prostrate attitude of petitioners as they laid their requests at the feet of the Lord. Jeremiah hoped hearing the message from God would lead Judah to repent of their sins.

“Each one will turn from his evil way And will each turn from their wicked ways” And will return every one from his evil way (v. 7). When people confess their sins and repent, they find God’s grace. God will grant each individual the power to turn to Him.

“For the anger and fury that the LORD has pronounced against this people are intense For the anger and wrath pronounced against this people by the LORD are great” For great is the anger and the fury that the LORD hath pronounced against this people (v. 7). The wrath of God had such intensity and threatened such a heavy judgment that the only means of receiving His grace could come through repentance.

Baruch son of Neriah did everything the prophet Jeremiah had commanded him Baruch son of Neriah did everything Jeremiah the prophet told him to do Baruch the son of Neriah did according to all that Jeremiah the prophet commanded him (v. 8). Several months may have passed from the time Jeremiah dictated God’s message to Baruch. The Lord’s instructions to Jeremiah began in the fourth year of Jehoiakim’s reign (v. 1), but Baruch did not actually deliver the message on the day of fasting until the king’s fifth year (v. 9). By this time the Babylonian army had captured the nearby Philistine city of Ashkelon, raising the fears of the people in Jerusalem. Nevertheless, Baruch faithfully delivered the message exactly as Jeremiah had told him to.

Jeremiah 36:16-18

Connection to The Point. Baruch acknowledged his role as Jeremiah’s scribe.

The setting. With the scroll in hand, Baruch made his way into the temple on the day of fasting. An official named Gemariah son of Shaphan the scribe or secretary allowed Baruch to use his room, located in the upper courtyard at the entrance to the New Gate of the temple (Jer. 36:10). Like his brother Ahikam (26:24), Gemariah supported Jeremiah. Their sympathies for the Lord’s work went back to Josiah and the work of rebuilding the temple (2 Kings 22). Having access to Gemariah’s chamber gave Baruch an ideal location to address people who gathered in the outer court as well as those who had squeezed their way in through the gate. When Gemariah’s son, Micaiah, heard Jeremiah’s message, he dashed off to the scribe’s chamber secretary’s room in the royal palace where all the officials had gathered. He reported everything he had heard Baruch read to the people at the temple. The king’s counselors immediately sent Jehudi to fetch Baruch and the scroll so he could read it to them. Having come from nobility, the officials received Baruch politely and asked him to read (Jer. 36:9-15).

When they had heard all these words (v. 16). Baruch read everything to them, not just a portion of the prophecy read at the temple. The king’s cabinet riveted their attention on Baruch as they listened to the message in its entirety.

They turned to look at each other in fear and said to Baruch They were afraid both one and other, and said unto Baruch (v. 16). The officials did not respond like Josiah when he tore his clothes in repentance when Shaphan read the rediscovered book of the law to him (2 Kings 22:10-13). However, while Jeremiah had declared similar messages for the past twenty-three years, this time something clicked. They heard Jeremiah’s warning and trembled in fear as they looked to see how the others reacted. They knew Judah faced the impending wrath of God.

“We must surely tell the king all these things We must report all these words to the king” We will surely tell the king of all these words (v. 16). The Hebrew conveys an emphatic sense of urgency; therefore, they agreed they most assuredly had to report this to Jehoiakim, but not as tattle-tellers. They did not intend greater trouble for Jeremiah. After the public reading in the temple and now their private audience with Baruch, they dared not keep this matter concealed from the king.

Then they asked Baruch, “Tell us, how did you write all these words? At his dictation Tell us, how did you come to write all this? Did Jeremiah dictate it?” And they asked Baruch, saying, Tell us now, How didst thou write all these words at his mouth? (v. 17).

Knowing the deep-seated hatred the king had for Jeremiah, the cabinet officials did not ask out of curiosity. Perhaps they wanted to ferret out whether Baruch wrote from memory after hearing the prophet repeatedly for years or if he had recorded accurately what was spoken through dictation. This diligent questioning to discover the origin of the scroll showed they recognized Jeremiah’s divine gift and prophetic authority.

Baruch said to them, “At his dictation” “Yes,” Baruch replied, “he dictated all these words to me” Baruch answered them, He pronounced all these words unto me with his mouth (v. 18). Baruch acknowledged his role as Jeremiah’s scribe. He recorded exactly what came from Jeremiah’s mouth (literally, what “he spoke from his mouth”). Baruch had not merely synthesized Jeremiah’s prophecies (v. 2). Baruch clearly understood his subordinate role, yet surely he also understood that admitting to having a part in preserving Jeremiah’s words put him at risk.

“He recited all these words to me while I was writing on the scroll in ink And I wrote them in ink on the scroll” I wrote them with ink in the book (v. 18). By specifying *in ink*, Baruch implied he added nothing to the process except writing down what the prophet said. This marks the only Old Testament mention of the use of ink, a mixture of soot or lampblack mixed with gum arabic or gum acacia or a mixture of nutgalls with iron sulfate.

The rest of chapter 36. Fearing the greater danger Jeremiah and Baruch faced, the king’s scribes advised them to hide and not to tell anyone where they hid while the scribes stored the scroll for safekeeping. Then they reported the incident to Jehoiakim who sent Jehudi to fetch the scroll. But Jehoiakim gave the scroll a hostile reception. As Jehudi read to the king and his officials, Jehoiakim stopped the reading every three to four columns, slashed the scroll, and tossed it into the fire until the entire scroll burned. The king shut his ears to the scribes who pleaded with him to stop. He also commanded the immediate arrest of Jeremiah and Baruch.

The Lord instructed Jeremiah to write another copy of His words and proclaimed that Jehoiakim would face severe punishment for his disrespect. No king nor anyone else can destroy God’s Word. Because the king refused to believe God’s warning of coming judgment through Babylon, Jeremiah pronounced a threefold judgment on Jehoiakim. First, the king’s sons would not succeed him to rule Judah. Second, his body would be thrown out just as he had cast away the scroll into the fire. Finally, his descendants, his court officials, and the people of Jerusalem and Judah would suffer all the disaster of God’s judgment due to their refusal to listen to Him.

Jeremiah 45:1-5

Connection to The Point. God spoke to Baruch in a moment of discouragement and told him that He would bless him in a way far better than what he might pursue or gain on his own.

The setting. Studying through the book of Jeremiah provides interpretative challenges not faced with many other Old Testament books. Most importantly, the arrangement of the chapters does not follow a chronological order. For the most part, the contents of the book came from manuscripts of Jeremiah’s prophecies. As an example, the contents of the chapters immediately following Jehoiakim’s burning of the scroll in chapter 36 shifted to King Zedekiah, Judah’s last king (Jer. 37–39), then to messages to the remnant following the fall of Jerusalem (chs. 40–44), who led away Jeremiah and Baruch, along with many other people (43:6), into Egypt.

Chronologically, chapter 45 follows chapter 36. Its placement following chapter 44 reinforces the finality of the Lord’s judgment. This brief chapter concerning Baruch brought an insightful conclusion to the collection of events and prophecies in chapters 36–45.

This is the word that the prophet Jeremiah spoke to Baruch When Baruch son of Neriah wrote on a scroll the words Jeremiah the prophet dictated The word that Jeremiah the prophet spake unto Baruch (v. 1). Jeremiah spoke these words to Baruch after he had written down Jeremiah’s prophetic message of judgment to the people of Jerusalem. This faithful layman who served the Lord as Jeremiah’s scribe needed encouragement. Baruch had every reason to be deeply discouraged because of the depravity and evil

influence leaders of Judah had upon the people. Jeremiah had repeatedly warned judgment would come unless they repented and returned to the Lord. People often mistreated Jeremiah and Baruch. Perhaps he had grown tired of the constant rejection and longed for the life he once knew as a member of a prominent family.

These words (v. 1). The contents of the scroll included Jeremiah's prophecies from the thirteenth year of Josiah to the fourth year of Jehoiakim.

In the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah (v. 1). The date linked this chapter with chapter 36 and the events around Jehoiakim's cutting and burning the scroll.

"This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says to you, Baruch" Thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel, unto thee Baruch (v. 2). Jeremiah made it clear that the covenant God of Israel, in whom Baruch had placed his trust, knew his name and everything about him.

"You have said, 'Woe is me, because the LORD has added misery to my pain! You said, 'Woe to me! The LORD has added sorrow to my pain' "Thou didst say, Woe is me now! for the LORD hath added grief to my sorrow (v. 3). While nothing in the text hints at Baruch's misery, he had endured a lot of opposition and abuse. He must have expressed some of his grief and frustration to the prophet. God's words here contain similar elements following some of Jeremiah's own confessions (12:5-6; 15:19-21).

" 'I am worn out with groaning and have found find no rest' "I fainted in my sighing, and I find no rest. (v. 3). A self-centered or self-pitying attitude may be indicated by the five personal pronouns in the original language in this verse (woe is *me*, *my* pain or sorrow, *I* am worn out, *I* fainted with *my* groaning, *I* sighing, and *I* have not found rest). Previously Baruch must have mourned for what would happen to Judah, but now he mourned for what he endured. With his world falling apart, he faced total exhaustion, physically and spiritually. Both the present and the future seemed dark and foreboding.

"This is what you are to say to him: 'This is what the LORD says The LORD has told me to say to you, 'This is what the LORD says' "Thus shalt thou say unto him, The LORD saith thus (v. 4). Normally Baruch wrote to others what the Lord spoke through Jeremiah, but now God instructed the prophet to deliver a strong word for his discouraged and exhausted servant.

" 'What I have built I am about to demolish, and what I have planted I am about to uproot—the whole land!! will overthrow what I have built and uproot what I have planted, throughout the earth' "Behold, that which I have built will I break down, and that which I have planted I will pluck up, even this whole land (v. 4). The message to Baruch began with a reiteration of one of the central themes of the book—the Lord builds and plants but He also breaks down and uproots (1:10). This served to remind Baruch about God's great power to do as He pleased. Essentially God told him that although he felt discouraged and exhausted, much more judgment would come.

" 'But as for you, do you pursue great things for yourself? Stop pursuing! Should you then seek great things for yourself? Do not seek them' "And seekest thou great things for thyself? seek them not (v. 5). What a contemporary word! Although Baruch's education, experience, and family background might secure him some position and honor in the government along with some wealth and prosperity, none of these would secure him true peace or real life. God cautioned him not to set his sights on high personal accomplishments and on making a great name for himself.

" 'For I am about to bring disaster on all humanity For I will bring disaster on all people' "For, behold, I will bring evil upon all flesh (v. 5). God reminded Baruch that He would bring judgment on all flesh and sweep away all worldly power, popularity, and prestige. No one can avert God's hand of judgment.

" 'But I will grant you your life like the spoils of war wherever you go But wherever you go I will let you escape with your life' "But thy life will I give unto thee for a prey in all places whither thou goest (v. 5). The Lord made a wonderful promise to this dear servant by assuring him that He would protect him through the disaster. In the coming judgment of Israel, God would give Baruch his life as booty (21:9; 38:2; 39:18), an image of a soldier barely escaping with his life after a defeat in battle. While he might not attain his worldly dreams, Baruch had assurance God would not forsake him.

