

Study Fifteen: Baruch the Blessed

Baruch's Background'

Baruch means 'blessed'. This was the name Baruch's parents gave him at birth. It seemed he was destined for a life of blessing. All the portents were good. His grandfather was Maseiah the governor of Jerusalem, and his father was Neriah. Neriah meant 'Jehovah is light' indicating the nature of this man. Baruch's brother was Seraiah who became quartermaster to King Zedekiah the last king of Judah who was taken to Babylon. Seraiah was a man of stature, being given a prophetic commission at the last by Jeremiah (51:59-61), which showed Jeremiah's high regard for him. This commission was to be carried out when the Israelite captives reached Babylon. Born into such a family Baruch was indeed blessed.

Baruch and Jeremiah

In 32:6-49 Jeremiah has a prophetic word from God telling him to buy land and tell the people it was a parable of Israel's restoration after God's judgement of exile upon it. The deed was given to Baruch to hold it in trust. The rich and powerful prayer which Jeremiah then prayed to God, plus God's answer to his prayer must have given Baruch (i) a revelation of God, and (ii) a revelation of Jeremiah as God great prophet. Baruch, we can believe thus became a changed man. Associated with Jeremiah he became a great man of God 7.

Baruch as Jeremiah's Scribe

Chapter 36 describes the work Baruch did along with Jeremiah. The prophet was commanded to write 'all the words that I have spoken to you against Israel and Judah and all the nations, from the day I spoke to you from the days of Josiah until today'. Jeremiah called Baruch and requested him to write the words and then to read them in the house of the LORD to the people, and this he did. He was then called into an assembly of the princes and was told to read the words to them. In turn the princes had it read before the King, Jehoiakim, who listened to the reading but cut up the document page by page and burned it in a brazier before the assembled court. Jeremiah then took another scroll and dictated 'all the words of the scroll which Jehoiakim king of Judah had burned in the fire; and many similar words were added to them'. We can imagine the disappointment of Baruch, and also see his faithfulness in delivering God's message to the people and the king.

Baruch's Complaint and God's Answer

The text of chapter 45 is as follows,

I The word that Jeremiah the prophet spoke to Baruch the son of Neriah, when he wrote these words in a book at the dictation of Jeremiah, in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah: 2 "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, to you, O Baruch: 3 You said, 'Woe is me! for the LORD has added sorrow to my pain; I am weary with my groaning, and I find no rest.' 4 Thus shall you say to him, Thus says the LORD: Behold, what I have built I am breaking down, and what I have planted I am plucking up -- that is, the whole land. 5 And do you seek great things for yourself? Seek them not; for, behold, I am bringing evil upon all flesh, says the LORD; but I will give you your life as a prize of war in all places to which you may go."

What we have to see is that Baruch was not just some kind of amanuensis to Jeremiah, but was with him in all that he said. Indeed in 43:2-3 the 'insolent men' told Jeremiah, 'You are telling a lie. The Lord our God did not send you to say, "Do not go to **Egypt**"; but **Baruch the son of Neriah has set you against us**, to deliver us into the hands of Chaldeans, that they may kill or take us into exile in Babylon.' Baruch, we assume, eventually wrote down all Jeremiah's prophecies, and so was deeply influenced by them. and in this sense knew the mind of God.

The 45th chapter shows us his difficulties,

(i) he was tired out with non-success, of having his written prophecies destroyed and of being opposed by those who refused to receive them, and who were persecuting him for his part in them.

(ii) God needed to reveal to Baruch what were his judgements on Judah, namely that He was breaking down what He had built, and plucking up what He had planted. In other words there was no grand future for Judah, Jeremiah or Baruch.

Baruch Seeking Success,

Baruch was really as a prophet by reason of his total involvement with Jeremiah and his prophetic ministry. So in the passage quoted above God speaks to Baruch through Jeremiah. His words are interesting, 'And do you seek great things for yourself? Seek them not' for Baruch was looking for success in his work and life. We must be careful how we interpret the idea here of 'success'. Baruch was not looking for 'great things' for himself, so much as he was wanting success in and for Israel, and—even more the vindication of Jeremiah and himself thereby. 'No,' said God, 'this cannot be. Ahead lies the fact that I am bringing evil upon all flesh.' So the prophet and his scribe are not going to be 'successful'. The work is not going to be vindicated. It is here we are met with the human desire for fame. We are not saying Baruch was out to achieve that, but more often than not *we* are. Milton's lines are famous (Lycidas, 1, 20, 7-73)

Fame is the spur that the proud spirit doth raise (that last infirmity of noble mind) To spurn delights and live laborious days.

We will do anything for fame. We see the cases of Miriam and Aaron wanting to be equal with Moses, of Korah, Dathan and Abiram wanting to be as Moses and Aaron—able to offer up sacrifices—of Jesus' disciples desiring positions of power, and Diotrophes 'who likes to put himself first'. There may be very few who not seek fame in one way or another. Baruch is promised no fame, no 'great things' for himself. However God does promise him he will not meet an untimely death, and this is a great promise for it means he can carry on in prophetic living and utterance and not be destroyed. The evil that God is bringing upon all flesh will not harm him. What is more, Baruch will have a good life because he has now discovered the full mind of God regarding Israel, Jeremiah and himself. That he was a man of strong character is undeniable, and Josephus, on the basis of Jeremiah 43:1-3, says he influenced Jeremiah to appeal to the residue of the people of Judah to remain in the land and not to go to Egypt.

So well-known was this servant of the great prophet that many apocryphal books are accredited to him, namely *The Apocalypse of Baruch*, *the Book of Baruch*, *The Rest of the Words of Baruch*, the gnostic *Book of Baruch*, and others. Even though it is to be doubted that he wrote any of these, it is a testimony to the wisdom which was attributed to him.

Having seen these details we can now trace the story of this splendid person. He was 'Baruch the Blessed' indeed. His name was given prophetically and proved to be true. The judgements of God were not 'the end of the road' but the beginning of a great ministry, In this sense Baruch is an example of the fatuity of ambitious fame, and the richness of life God gives the humble and meek.