

Jeremiah 45:1-5 Flashback to My Younger Lament Falls Church AM 3/5/2023

The man Jeremiah is such a big success that he can have the effect of intimidating us, rather than motivating. Jeremiah was big name. A zealous and faithful person influencing the temple, the nation, and the world. Most of us do not live on the level of Jeremiah.

Chapter 45 is not about Jeremiah. It is about Baruch.

Baruch is not familiar to us, and that is the point. Baruch is a little person, like us. There is a Book of Jeremiah, but there is no Book of Baruch.

We know very little about Baruch. Baruch was called by God to work with Jeremiah and support Jeremiah. Like Luther had Melancthon, and Batman had Robin, so Jeremiah had Baruch. He only appears in the Book of Jeremiah four times, and nowhere else in the Bible. Yet we owe to Baruch the fact that we have the Book of Jeremiah in our Bibles. Chapter 45 is a story about God giving an attitude adjustment and encouragement to little person like you and me.

In Luke 8:1-3, there were unimportant people who served Jesus. They were women who had been healed of sicknesses and evil spirits. God used their faithful service to Jesus to help spread God's Word. Same with Baruch. God used Baruch's faithful service to Jeremiah to help spread God's Word.

**The LORD provided a flashback of the scribe named Baruch as his younger lamenting self, as a representative teaching lesson to readers.**

Chapter 45 is a flashback to an earlier time in the life of Baruch. Why a flashback here? The book of Jeremiah is organized topically. And now that Jeremiah's last words have been presented, we hear from Baruch.

### **1. The appearances, in order, of the scribe named Baruch.**

#### **a. First - reading in the temple. (ch. 36)**

We are suddenly back to the same year in which Baruch helped the prophet Jeremiah to prepare a scroll to be read before the King in the temple of God.

Baruch was burdened about his task. We remember the grief and burden of the great Jeremiah on that day, but we have never heard of the grief and burden of Baruch until now, chapter 45 out of 52 chapters.

Like great painters of art often paint themselves into the picture, so here Baruch as the scribe, wrote himself into the Book of Jeremiah, under God's direction and Jeremiah's approval. This chapter 45 is Baruch's way of 'signing' the book that he compiled.

We need to remember as we flash back that the scene was the coming judgment of God upon the city of Jerusalem and on the whole country of Judah. In that context, it makes more sense that God was rebuking the scribe Baruch for his own ambitions.

We also need to remember as we flashback, how the king burned the scroll, piece by piece, after cutting it with a knife. That scroll of the Word of God was the

handwriting of Baruch, being cut into shreds and going up in flames! None of us stopped to consider Baruch when we studied chapter 36. Have you ever lost a document on a computer? Baruch says, yeah, don't get me started!

Also, as we flashback in that context of chapter 36, it makes sense that God would focus on the promise that Baruch will survive. If the king would ignore Jeremiah, and burn the scroll of God, what might the king do to Baruch the scribe? If an enemy army is coming to destroy the city, what might happen to Baruch?

So, we are studying a flashback to a time when Baruch was younger, when Baruch was lamenting, and when God promised to spare his life, many years earlier. Sure enough, God fulfilled that promise and spared the life of Baruch. That fact encourages us to believe that God will fulfill all of His promises, which He will do.

Chapter 45 is connected with chapter 36. Both are dated in the same year. Both have to do with Baruch. Both refer to the writing of the scroll of Jeremiah. They function like book-ends. Chapter 36 started to tell us something, and now chapter 45 takes us back to that same moment and concludes by telling us something else from that earlier day. What was reported in chapters 37-44, in between these book-ends? A lot! To summarize, we read about the actual attack and fall of Jerusalem, the resulting chaos, the group that ran away to Egypt, and the final events and final words of Jeremiah's life.

Because of the placement of chapter 45 here - after Jeremiah's last words - it shows us that the faithful sidekick Baruch was with Jeremiah that whole time!

The date is significant. We see it here in chapter 45, verse 1. Let me explain to the children that the word dictation means one person speaks out loud, and the other person writes down what was said. Now let me read verse 1, and listen for the date, "*The word that Jeremiah the prophet spoke to Baruch the son of Neriah, when [Baruch] wrote these words in a book at the dictation of Jeremiah, in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah:*"

So, again, the date is significant. The fourth year of Jehoiakim was the year 605 BC. It was the year that the enemy King of Babylon stunningly defeated Egypt at the famous battle of Carchemish, paving the way for Babylon to dominate the whole region, including overtaking Jerusalem in Judah.

That was the same year that King Jehoiakim rejected the Word of God, leading to the destruction of Jerusalem. The date is significant, because it was when everything turned and changed. It was the beginning of the end. There was a big downturn that led to big consequences in the end for Jeremiah and the city and the nation. So now, after the end, Baruch takes us back to the launch-point, and shares with us another vantage point - a glimpse of what it all meant from the perspective of Baruch, who was there as an eye-witness!

### **b. Second - purchasing the field. (ch.32)**

The second time, chronologically, that Baruch appeared in the Book of Jeremiah was 17 years later. (Don't be confused that it is written out of order, back in chapter 32.) This was the time when Jeremiah was told by God to buy a field. How did that impact Baruch? Now 17 years later, Baruch was still serving Jeremiah. But at that time, Jeremiah was imprisoned, or confined on house-arrest to the courtyard of the guard, which was joined to the palace compound. This was during the final months of the attack on Jerusalem.

Jeremiah was imprisoned, but Baruch was not imprisoned. So, what was Baruch doing? Faithful and meticulous as ever, Baruch served like an attorney for Jeremiah, who drafted all of the legal documents and formalities necessary in order to close on a piece of property. Jeremiah was buying the field from his cousin Hanamel, and it was Baruch who ensured that the official deed was carefully stored for posterity, even though a war was coming.

It is supposed to dawn on us that it was not comfortable for Baruch to appear in the courthouse repeatedly as the attorney for the unpopular prophet Jeremiah. Baruch was faithful in the tasks, but we realize now that it was a grief to him.

### **c. Third - dragged away into Egypt. (ch.43:3,6-7)**

The third time we find Baruch popping up in the Book of Jeremiah was in chapter 43. This was after the fall of the city and the subsequent chaos. A group decided to run away to Egypt and they were taking Jeremiah with them out of the country. Where did that leave Baruch then? They dragged Baruch into Egypt also! Jeremiah's scribe, attorney, and friend Baruch, was also taken off to Egypt, right along with Jeremiah.

We don't know what happened to Baruch. Either he died in Egypt with Jeremiah, or else, after Jeremiah died in Egypt, that Baruch traveled to Babylon, and joined the exiles. Baruch's brother Seraiah was already one of the exiles in Babylon, and Baruch might have had the ability to get there. He was a supporter of the pro-Babylonian policy, and a member of a high-ranking family, so Baruch could expect a friendly reception if he made it to Babylon. It might even explain how the scroll of Jeremiah got to the exiles in Babylon, so that they could read it!

That is all we have in the whole Bible about Baruch.

Now we are ready to study the lament of Baruch, and God's reply.

## **2. The lament of the scribe named Baruch. (ch. 45:1-3)**

Verse 1 – Baruch was the son of Neriah. This was a powerful family that had connections with the government. Baruch's grandfather Maaseiah had been governor of Jerusalem! Baruch's brother Seraiah was a staff officer of the king's royal family. Baruch would have had access to inner government committees meeting in the temple complex and in the royal palace. Baruch was also a highly educated man and a professional scribe. Despite all of that, Baruch had chosen to put his skills at the service of this unpopular prophet Jeremiah. It means that the

family probably lined up with Jeremiah, and wanted the people to listen to Jeremiah, to repent, and to accept God's plan of exile in Babylon as the way of salvation from their sins.

Baruch was from a family that was loyal to God, and Baruch himself was loyal to God and to Jeremiah. Baruch was a model in his devotion to God and in his work. As a scribe or official document secretary, he was accurate, hard-working, and reliable, despite the charged environment in which he was required to work. Baruch had courage to put himself at risk of opposition, attack, injury or worse, for reading publicly the 23 years' worth of statements that Jeremiah had preached.

This commitment involved a personal sacrifice or cost for Baruch.

Verse 2 – This is one of only two places in the whole book of Jeremiah in which Jeremiah gave a word from the LORD not to a group, but to an individual person. Baruch represented others, and so the lesson belongs to us as well. It is those who stood with Jeremiah. It is those who stand with the LORD and His Word.

Verse 3 – Baruch had suffered right alongside of Jeremiah. It is not surprising that Baruch's lament echoes the lament of Jeremiah his master. Baruch was suffering. We have one quote of what Baruch said in verse 3, let me read it now, *“Woe is me! For the Lord has added sorrow to my pain. I am weary with my groaning, and I find no rest.”*

Baruch was sorrowful for the same reason Jeremiah had been sorrowful. What made the weeping prophet weep? The spiritual condition of the people.

The content of the chapters that Jeremiah preached, and that Baruch wrote down were awful to contemplate. Not only did Baruch hear the sermons the first time around, but later also needed to hear them all over again, as he read them in the temple out loud. All at once, all together, accumulating, compounding, filling the ears of Baruch and his mind, what a crescendo moment of considering the coming doom and destruction! Every day Baruch was reminded of the ugliness of the sin of sinners – he belonged to a group of people who were defying God, breaking His covenant, and spiraling down in wickedness and corruption.

If you want to understand verse 3 here and the sorrow, pain, weariness and groaning that gave no rest to Baruch, just read back over chapters 1-25 of Jeremiah. It is an unrelenting message. Then imagine writing that all out by hand, line by line, with pen and ink, day after day, for as many days as it would take to complete the task. When we read Jeremiah it is all done. When Baruch read it, it was statements about his own people, his own times, his own family members, his own immediate future. Baruch was hearing the voice of his God speaking through his friend Jeremiah, and Baruch knew it was all true. And Baruch's job was to

carefully write it all down, and then read it all out loud in the temple. There is no escape for the coming judgment. Now we understand the groaning of Baruch.

### **3. God's answer to the scribe named Baruch. (ch.45:4-5)**

God's answer to Baruch in verse 4 seems oddly irrelevant to Baruch's lament at first. But then the connection leaps out at us. What God is doing in bringing judgment is deeply painful – to God Himself!

Since Jeremiah was groaning about the sin and fall of Jerusalem, and Baruch was groaning about the sin and fall of Jerusalem, what must have been God's reaction? There is a hint in verse 4 of what it meant for God Himself to be destroying Jerusalem and Judah. Imagine destroying on a vast scale what you had carefully built and planted – that is what God did.

So back when all of this groaning was happening in Baruch, we are now finding out what God told Jeremiah to say to Baruch, verse 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.”*

These words echo Jeremiah's call in Jeremiah 1:10 about God tearing down and building up.

These words of God also condense a thousand years of God's patient building and planting a people from the sole family of Abraham, to a great nation. It is heartbreaking to lose what is precious to you, and that in which you have invested your heart. We are called on to imagine the heart of God watching the destruction of the vineyard that He had planted. God's wrath comes at the cost of God's pain and tears.

Verse 5 is the next part of God's answer to Baruch. In contrast to what God has to do, then God turns back to Baruch's lament. Here is Verse 5, *“And do you seek great things for yourself? Seek them not, for behold, I am bringing disaster upon all flesh, declares the Lord. But I will give you your life as a prize of war in all places to which you may go.”*

God's pain and tears are compared to Baruch's lament. “Do you seek great things for yourself?”

Baruch was tired of being the word processor for an unpopular prophet. Maybe initially, Baruch was honored to be called to serve as the personal scribe for Jeremiah. It seems Baruch was disillusioned. God said Baruch had a hankering after some more significant place in those corridors of power, perhaps in national politics. Baruch wanted something bigger and something better.

Ambition in line with the will of God is godly ambition.

But personal career ambition in Jerusalem at that time was like applying for a promotion on board the Titanic. It lacks long-term prospects.

Baruch wanted to advance his career, and maybe started to regret taking the assignment to work with Jeremiah. God's answer is the next three words after

God's question. About those career goals, Baruch? About those great things you are seeking for yourself Baruch? God says, "*Seek them not.*"

Why? Because Baruch was living in the context of coming judgment.

However, what should Baruch do? Trust in God's promise of blessing, just as much as Baruch trusted in God's promise of judgment. Okay, what was God's promise of blessing? Verse 5, "...*I WILL GIVE YOU YOUR LIFE AS A PRIZE OF WAR...*"

This points us ahead to the cross. What would be more painful to God than destroying the city of Jerusalem and the Temple because of the sin of the people? Answer: God the Father destroying God the Son on the cross at Jerusalem, because of the sin of the people. The precious eternal Son of God, whom God loved from all eternity, would need to be broken down and torn down.

God does not take pleasure in the death of the wicked.

How much more the death of the Innocent Son of God, for the sins of others.

We know the big theme in the book of Jeremiah is that God preserves a remnant of His people, whom He brings back to Zion. We know how this is fulfilled in the New Testament in Jesus Christ. We know that in Christ, God preserves a remnant of humanity, namely the church, through the fires of the coming judgment. As Jesus said in Mark 8:35, "*Whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's [sake] will find [his life].*" And as Paul wrote in Romans 11:5, "*So, too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace.*" And in Revelation 7, the number who are sealed are the remnant whom God preserves, and those from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, these are the ones coming out of tribulation, these are the ones who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. These are the ones who are before His throne and serve Him day and night in His temple. He who sits on the throne will shelter them with His presence. These are the ones who will hunger no more, neither thirst anymore. The sun shall not strike them. The Lamb will be their shepherd. He will guide them to springs of living water. God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

### **Conclusion:**

1. God sees our suffering, and God hears our lament. There is a time to work and a time to rest. A time to suffer, and a time to ask for help. There is a time to keep going and a time to make a change. We understand all of that surrounding suffering. But today's study has a specific question. When we reach the point that Baruch reached –Can we keep going without all of the insulation of a safe and reliable world that operates according to our pre-conceived notions? When we have nothing else to rely on except for God, is that enough for us? That is suffering that turns us upward to seeking God afresh. God has a takeaway lesson

for us in this chapter. God invites us to place our suffering in the context of God's own suffering, and in the context of eternity! The suffering of Jesus Christ on the cross for our sins is to be the re-orienting vantage point for all of our suffering. What did Jesus suffer? Death on the cross. For whom? We sinners. Those things re-focus us correctly as we experience our own suffering and offer up our own lament to God. Will God get us through this? Yes. How do we know? Because in this chapter, Baruch is already through it. Baruch is remembering how faithful God was to Baruch from the moment of the flashback, to the moment of writing chapter 45. As the title of the sermon indicates, the lesson of chapter 45 is that we are encouraged to flashback to our own younger lament. We have suffered before, and we had this same God. What did we learn about God during our previous suffering? We learned that God is faithful. So, what lesson ought we to bring into our current suffering? The same takeaway lesson that we learned before - that God is faithful. We are invited to learn from Baruch, and learn from God in chapter 45 that God sees our suffering and God hears our lament, and that God will get us through this current bout of suffering.

2. God promised to you to preserve your life forever through Christ.

In order for God to promise Baruch his life, God would need to control all of the circumstances of an enemy invasion, the destruction of a city, and all the results. We serve a God who does that. At the end of the Book of Jeremiah, we are told about Baruch's pain, and God's promise to him in the middle of his pain and suffering. Not that the suffering would be removed. Rather, that Baruch would outlive the suffering. Baruch would survive. To set our suffering in the proper Christian context is to see that God has already given us the answer to our suffering. Heaven. We will outlive whatever we are facing right now. We have already been given everlasting life! How? Through the suffering of Christ on the cross, and His resurrection. When we look at our suffering from this perspective, our suffering is dwarfed, our suffering is meaningful, and our suffering has a terminus. When we realize that we have heaven, we also must realize that we have God's protections from now until we get to heaven. We have God's presence, God's care, God's tender mercy and compassion.

3. Be content and be faithful in the role where God has placed you.

God challenged Baruch's ambitions, and God challenges our ambitions.

Some Christians think that the important thing is not that God's will gets done, but rather that I am the one who gets to do it. Many Christians want God to get the glory, as long as they also can share in the limelight!

Some Christians will not be involved, if they cannot be the main leader.

God challenges our ambitions here - instead of attempting great things for God, how about attempting small things for God?

Bonhoefer wrote, "When a person has completely given up the idea of making something of himself...then one throws oneself entirely into the arms of God, then one no longer takes seriously his own suffering."

Everybody knows about Jeremiah. Who has heard of Baruch?

Even today, people name their children Jeremiah. Who names their kid Baruch?

Baruch suffered in obscurity. But God challenged that.

Jeremiah needed Baruch. God sets it up that way. Jeremiah's need Baruch's.

Baruch's are people who are content and faithful they are servants of the servant of The Lord. The Baruch's never come on stage and hear the applause. But without Baruch's, the show could not go on.

We have a hymn "Dare to be Daniel."

No one writes a hymn, "Can you bear to be Baruch?"

How about you?

What if God put you into a support role? Can you view that as a vital role?

There are plenty of people in the Bible who were unknown in world history, but had a vital role in God's kingdom.

Consider the role of the mother of Moses. She is unknown. The only thing she is known for is support to Moses - her role as the mother of Israel's greatest leader Moses. Was she faithful when called upon? Yes. When Moses was a little boy, the life of Moses was in danger. God used the mother of Moses and the sister of Moses to save the life of Moses, so that Moses could go on to do all that God called Moses to do later. The mother of Moses had a vital role in God's Kingdom.

Consider the role of Baruch. the Book of Jeremiah and the prophet Jeremiah. When there was a need for the prophet to be supported and for the book to be transcribed, God used Baruch. So, all of us who benefit from the Book of Jeremiah owe a debt of thanks to this man who was unknown in world history. It seems likely that the servant Baruch was with Jeremiah the whole time of his suffering, and we love Baruch for that.

As we will sing in our closing hymn, we pray to God that He would make each of us "...content to fill a little space, if Thou be glorified."

Jesus said the same truth this way in Matthew 6:33, "*seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.*"

Our top priority as Christians is to be the Kingdom of God, not making our own mark on this world. Be content and be faithful in the role where God has placed you.