

## Baruch'S Discontent

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Please be turning to Jeremiah 45. Today, let us look at an Old Testament figure who complained of his lot in life during troubled times. What can he teach us as we stand today at the threshold of the tribulation and the overturn of Babylon?

**Jeremiah 45:1-3** The word that Jeremiah the prophet spoke to Baruch the son of Neriah, when he had written these words in a book at the instruction of Jeremiah, in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, saying, "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, to you, O Baruch: 'You said, "Woe is me now! For the Lord has added grief to my sorrow. I fainted in my sighing, and I find no rest." '

Baruch's words are not quoted directly; they come to us through God's recitation here. Maybe Baruch verbalized these exact words but more probably, I would think, that he simply complained chronically registering his discontent to Jeremiah over a period of time but using different words. God may have distilled them here into a kernel as it were. Baruch's discontent, in a nutshell.

"Woe is me!" Baruch says. How did God respond? As we will see, He first rebukes Baruch, making it clear exactly what God's plans are and then He issues to him a remarkable promise in itself. Now, remember, God is not speaking directly to Baruch but He is asking Jeremiah to relay His message to Baruch.

**Jeremiah 45:4** Thus you shall say to him, 'Thus says the Lord: "Behold, what I have built I will break down, and what I have planted I will pluck up, that is, this whole land.

God begins His response by putting things into perspective for Baruch. He says here He is about to uproot the whole land. And in verse 5, He adds that He is about to bring disaster on *every* living creature. This is the intent, this is His purpose in taking these actions. Notice that this is the kind of rhetoric that we encounter in Genesis 6 concerning the Flood.

**Genesis 6:7-8** So the Lord said, "I will destroy man whom I have created

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from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them." But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.

The parallels are remarkable, brethren. God protected Noah and his family in the ark as the world around them, the world that they knew was simply being wiped away. Likewise, if you were to look in Jeremiah 36:26, you would see that God had already taken action to hide away and protect Jeremiah and Baruch. They were hidden away at that time as the sun was setting on Judah. And indeed, all the civilizations that were around there were in various stages of unraveling at that particular time. God was uprooting them. God's advice for Baruch is very succinct.

**Jeremiah 45:5a** And do you seek great things for yourself? Do not seek them.

Now, I am not sure what great things Baruch had in mind that He wanted to mention. He was obviously in-the-know as we would say; he had intelligence. This was intelligence from God, through Jeremiah. If ever there was an insider in the world, it was Baruch. Knowledge is power. Did Baruch think that he could somehow leverage that power to turn a profit? To determine just what stocks to invest in on the JSE (Jerusalem Stock Exchange) so that he could make a profit?

Some people are able to do that. Was that in the back of his mind? I do not know. Perhaps he simply envisioned himself as a prominent contrary; people we call that today are famous for swimming upstream or against the mainstream. In this case, against the thinking of the established Jewish leadership. Some people are like that; that is their thing. They like to go against the flow and some few have even become quite famous in doing so; calling themselves visionaries, they work themselves into positions of power over a period of time and maybe that is what Baruch had in his mind.

Well, God does not mince words; He simply says, "Stop seeking!" It mattered not what was twisting Baruch's perception of the events that were happening around him; God simply tells him to change his attitude. Great things like fame, notoriety, and money would do him no good in circumstances that were so different, so totally unlike the days of the Father because God had simply uprooted *everything*. Let us look at the promise that God issues to Baruch.

**Jeremiah 45:5b** But I will give your life to you as a prize in all places,

wherever you go.

The implication of this statement is two-fold. First, God connects Baruch's life with war; war and struggle would characterize his life. Baruch would continue to live as a blessing from God in the midst of a highly volatile, highly unstable situation—not apart from that environment. Not in a state of immunity from its hardships while others all around him may lose lives, property, freedoms in the troubles that were just ahead. God promises that He would preserve Baruch's life.

Secondly, He said, “wherever you go” and that clause indicates that Baruch's life would be on the move. Perhaps he would even have to be fleeing for his life at times. His would not be a settled life behind a white picket fence located somewhere in Jerusalem. The rest that Baruch mentioned in the verses there would have to come later; it would not come in this life.

Well, brethren, having looked at that chapter let us pause and assess the scope of the situation. During the time of David and years before this, I am quite convinced that Jerusalem was the capital of the earth and it will be that way again sometime. But things had deteriorated badly and now very, very shortly Jerusalem would be seen by someone like Jeremiah in flames. Baruch would see it in ashes. And no one would be able to stop God. No one would be able to put out the fire.

**Jeremiah 17:27** But if you will not heed Me to hallow the Sabbath day, such as not carrying a burden when entering the gates of Jerusalem on the Sabbath day, then I will kindle a fire in its gates, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem, and it shall not be quenched.

God is telling Baruch to internalize the words that he himself had transcribed from dictation by Jeremiah. It was as though, for a time, Baruch had his own personal audience with God's prophet. He listened to Jeremiah speak every day. Some people learn through their pencil, they say; Baruch wrote down the words. He had no excuse for not having internalized those words. And through those words, God announced what we call the axial period of history and He announced it millennia before historian Karl Jaspers coined that term.

For example, Baruch had transcribed the words that we read in Jeremiah 25. God is saying, “Listen! Heed the message that you’re writing down, that you’re hearing all the time. Listen to it!”

In verse 27, God is telling Jeremiah to go to the kings of nations, give them a cup, and tell them:

**Jeremiah 25:27-29** "Therefore you shall say to them, 'Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, says: Drink, be drunk, and vomit! Fall to rise no more, because of the sword I will send among you.' And it shall be, if they refuse to take the cup from your hand to drink, then you shall say to them, 'You shall surely drink! For behold, I begin to bring calamity on the city which is called by My name, and should you be utterly unpunished? You shall not be unpunished, for I shall call for a sword on all the inhabitants of the earth, declares the LORD Almighty.'"

Jaspers asserts that many of the nations in the ancient world fell during what he called the axial period. It was approximately a 600 year period from 800 BC to 200 BC and Baruch and Jeremiah lived in the middle of that time. During that axial period, Israel fell quite early, Judah fell later, and much older empires like Babylon and Egypt also fell as did Assyria, Persia, the Hittite civilizations, and many, many others.

Further, Jaspers points out that, during this time civilizations in India, the Indus Valley, and those in the Far East also collapsed during this crossover period in history. Jaspers points out that in their place nations have set the course for modern history. Nations such as Greece and Rome rose to prominence. Nations which played no major part in history before the axial period popped up during that time.

Continuing in verses 31 and 32 of Jeremiah 25, God is stressing the total disaster that He is going to bring on the civilizations of Jeremiah's time:

**Jeremiah 25:31-32** A noise will come to the ends of the earth—for the LORD has a controversy with the nations; He will plead His case with all flesh, He will give those who are wicked to the sword,' " declares the LORD. Thus says the Lord of hosts: "Behold, disaster shall go forth from nation to nation, and a great whirlwind shall be raised up from the farthest parts of the earth."

You see brethren, in Jeremiah 45:4, God is reminding Baruch that there is a time to plant and that there is a time to uproot. And right now, He tells him, is a time for God to do some serious, serious uprooting.

As a result, the times of Jeremiah and Baruch would not be normal times. They would

be turbulent times often of vast and violent changes. All of this was coming soon and all of it was coming at the behest of God. It was not an accident and they could not stop it; they could not wish it away. Denying it would not arrest it. Cocooning themselves in business pursuits, hobbies, sports, family, work, entertainment, in anything like that would simply be an act of denial! It would *not* stop God.

In view of all the warnings that God had given to His prophets, all the warnings that He had given them through the years, in view indeed of the Babylonian armies that were right outside of the walls beginning siege operations against Jerusalem, in view of all that, such denial could be nothing less than cognitive dissonance running amok.

Any nations or any individual's attempts at splendid isolation or attempts at withdrawal from all this would not stop God's work or assuage its ubiquitous consequences. Bottom line, brethren, Baruch did not really heed the warning. He appears to have become focused, fixated on himself, seeking great things for himself in these troubled times. Baruch clearly underestimated the pales of his times. God was in the proximate act of ending the independent, Jewish state except possibly for a brief flicker during the days of the Maccabees, that state would never exist again; I mean never independently exist again until 1928 some 2,500 years after Baruch's time.

As God promised that He would do in Isaiah 5, He was tearing down the vineyard that He had planted and nourished for a long time. His actions were gigantic in scope; they were monumental in impact. Baruch was on the threshold of a momentous event and despite all the warnings, he would not recognize it.

**Jeremiah 30:23-24** Behold, the whirlwind of the LORD goes forth with fury, a continuing whirlwind; it will fall on the head of the wicked. The fierce anger of the LORD will not return until He has done it, and until He has performed the intents of His heart. In the latter days you will consider it.

Well, brethren, these are the latter days and we had better understand it. Because of that, what does Baruch's experience mean, what *should* it mean to us today? We are going to spend the rest of the time assessing those questions. What should it mean to us today?

Jaspers' idea of an axial or pivotal period in history has caught the imagination of any number of later writers. By the way, Jaspers lived and wrote around the time of the Nazi Germany; a number of writers caught his terminology.

Karen Armstrong, a religious historian of some controversy, has argued that the age of enlightenment beginning around 1650 AD is a second axial period in history. Well, I think she is late by about 200 years because I am going to argue that the Renaissance, which started in about 1450 AD, ushered in the start of a second axial period. Like the first one, it will last about 600 years. I will let you do the math.

The founding of the American Republic took place about halfway—in the middle—of this second axial period of 600 years. We are not at the beginning of it but somewhere near the end of it. We are at a time when civilizations are being overthrown and then new civilizations will be established by God in their place.

Jaspers argues that the first axial period saw vast changes in two things: ideas and government. So, if we are going to argue that a second axial period commenced around the time of the Renaissance, we need to show how differently the time of the Medieval Period was from the Renaissance. We need to show how it had different ideas, different approaches, different ways of thinking. And indeed, brethren, it was vastly different in so many ways.

If I had to pinpoint two cultural traits, two cultural artifacts, which defined the essence of the Medieval Period I would first pause at its widespread allegiance to authority. They were big on authority. And secondly, its commitment to structures. Structure and authority; the two are very much related.

The people of the Medieval Period believed in structure. They called them hierarchies and they had hierarchies all over the place. They had hierarchies within hierarchies, their view of the cosmos, their view of the solar systems, was always hierarchical. Their view of government, music, everything was hierarchical and at the top of each hierarchy was god. Not man but god. Now, it was not the God that we worship, it was not the right God, but it was god because their focus was primarily other-worldly. It was *not* secular.

In these governmental hierarchies, the man of the house had authority over his family. The king had what was called a divine right and he was answerable to no one except God. In religious matters, a pope was the final authority as a Vicar of Christ and his authority even superseded that of kings in certain periods of the Medieval Period.

But, as the Renaissance got started and as it progressed the concept of authority and the concept of structures fell under attack. God was no longer seen as the authority. As humanistic ideas arose and others spread, man replaced God. In fact, in our era, they had a philosopher who said God is dead, totally replaced; not even present.

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Now, there are lots of men and only one God. How do you build a government if you remove God as the final authority? How do you build a viable, workable government? People during and after the Renaissance thrashed around that question for decades and decades and decades. The Constitution of the United States is one of their answers of how to build a workable government when you do not have God at the top. Later on Marx had another idea and there are all kinds of other ideas about how to constitute a government. My point is that *none* of those ideas even came close to centralized authority and structure that was practiced in the Medieval Period.

It had changed so much by the 1700s and 1800s, as the Renaissance grabbed traction and moved forward. They were different answers, they were different approaches and, very frankly, they were increasingly degenerate answers and satanic approaches. Things, gradually, were getting worse, and worse, and worse until we have what we have today.

It may be useful to state the scope of the change from the Medieval Period to the Renaissance in this way: The great works of the Renaissance and its aftermath. I will pick three great works: The statue of David, we have all seen that statue of this guy without any clothes on; the music of Mozart; or the Declaration of Independence. Those are three works of the Renaissance and its aftermath; they simply could *not* have been created in 1250. The ideas that were behind those did not exist then.

Remember, ideas are spiritual; they are up in your mind. They may have existed in the minds of few individuals but they lacked three things: They lacked permanency, critical mass, and they lacked the necessary societal support. They got nowhere until their time had come around 1450 A.D.

During and after the Renaissance, the Pope came to lose much of his power that he had earlier in the Medieval Period. Kings came to lose their authority in the rise of what is properly called liberal democracy. And, finally, the Bible came to lose its authority and all of this is the result of ideas that became current during and after the Renaissance.

In short, the second axial period was indeed marked by huge changes in thinking which finally came to fruition in the works of people like Einstein, Marx, Darwin, Freud and all of these people who questioned traditional authority and the highly structured society that had been practiced before in the Middle Ages.

Traditional ideas of religion, science, ethics, individual, society were all classically understood and practiced. They all came under attack and they were knocked down one after another over the years. They were knocked down until we finally came to a brave,

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new world. They were knocked down by three areas: secularism (and secularism is simply another word for atheism); they were knocked down by the ideas of socialism; and one that we do not hear very often, communitarianism.

Those three things—secularism, socialism, and communitarianism—are the three legs of the stool that we call the brave, new world; the new world order which is virtually upon us. When it arrives, it may not be the tribulation but I suspect that it will slide into the tribulation very quickly.

Now, Jaspers asserts that not only ideas but governments also changed. Governments that had long been in existence changed and crashed during the first axial period, like Babylon and Egypt. Did the widespread fall of empires characterize civilization after the Renaissance? Did the fall of the idea of unquestioned authority and therefore the fall of the idea of hierarchical structure, both characterized in the Medieval Period, destabilize the world?

I think you know the answers. In all this maelstrom of change, it all transpired in the context of unspeakable violence: vast wars, genocides, dislocations. From the violence of Europe associated with the wars sparked by the rise of Protestantism and if you know your history, you will know about the reign of terror later on caused by the French Revolution. And who can deny that the 20<sup>th</sup> century was the most violent in history? Considering the two World Wars and the loss of life and property that were caused by people like Stalin, Hitler, and of course there were others.

How many empires have fallen since the Renaissance? Since about 1450? How many have fallen during this second axial period? Well, for you students out there, you may want to search Wikipedia for “The Empires of the World.” There are some tables up there that list all of the empires, or at least most of them, that have existed. It lists their land mass, the age, start date, end date, things like that. And it is amazing how many have fallen since 1450 A.D.

Here is a quick list of the principle empires in no special order and this is not exhaustive by any means:

The Byzantine Empire has been around 1500 years and today it is the Roman Empire. It died at the beginning of the Italian Renaissance in 1453 A.D. and was replaced by the Ottoman Empire. A major, major empire that did not fall until 1923.

If you were living in the 1400 and 1500s in France and in Germany, you were concerned about being overrun by the Ottoman Empire which was a Sunni-Muslim empire. You

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were really concerned. They controlled Hungary and a couple of times they attacked Vienna and were stopped by the Hapsburgs but they did come up almost as far as Vienna.

A powerful empire; the Spanish Empire. Its fore point in North America was the Presidio in San Francisco. A vast empire; it was gone.

The Russian Empire had trading posts in Hawaii and its fore point in North America was clear down, 150 miles from San Francisco in Fort Ross. Gone, simply gone. Very major empires gone. The smaller Portuguese Empire died in 2002 and it was the longest-lived empire of the colonial European empires.

The Incan Empire, the Aztec Empire, the Mayan Empire, the Holy Roman Empire, the German Empire, the Soviet Empire died a couple of decades ago. The British Empire on which the sun never set is dead. The Prussian Empire, the Austrian-Hungary Empire, and quite a few other empires died at the time of the First World War. The Japanese Empire died in 1945 to the ear-splitting sound of nuclear weapons.

The Chinese Empire gave way to a weak Chinese Republic which soon fell to the Red Chinese, what is called the Peoples' Republic of China; that happened in the last century. And finally, the American Empire is on the chopping block.

I suggest that the seismic violence that the current axial period will culminate in is the establishment of a new world order—a civilization so abusive of the environment and so destructive of human life that Christ will simply have to intervene to end it lest there be no one left alive. Christ talks about that in Matthew 24:22. The time is coming.

In the prosperity that we currently enjoy, with all of its diversity, with all its connectedness, it is easy for us to come to think the same way that Baruch did. We can read the times. We can fail to see the significance of the signs of the times, we can come to live as if all things were going to continue like they have since the beginning of creation. Peter warns about that kind of thinking in II Peter 3:4.

Worse yet, with Satan's prodding, it is easy to fall into the mistaken notion that if we just go to Sabbath services, if we just tithe, God will afford us our own type of safety behind suburban lawns of some type, green lawns, behind white picket fences and then whisk us off to some place of safety. We can think of all of this in spite of Christ's warnings that he specifically gives us in John 15.

**John 15:20** If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also.

Like Baruch, we may want to do a reality check. How was it with Christ, with the disciples, with the prophets? These were individuals who led extremely unsettled lives; they were persecuted, they often fled for their lives, theirs were not armchair jobs and they had no green lawns, no white picket fences around their houses. In fact, those kind of accoutrements were rare exceptions for God's servants throughout history. The rest that they had would come later.

Baruch's world, Jeremiah's world, was crumbling before their eyes. There was nothing that they could do to prevent God's overturning their world. In all this turmoil, God tells Baruch to remember hope! He asks Baruch to remember that the commission was about more than destruction. He had transcribed the commission; Baruch *knew* the commission. I will only quote a couple of verses.

**Jeremiah 1:9-10** "Behold, I have put My words in your mouth. See, I have this day set you over the nations and over the kingdoms to root out and to pull down, to destroy and throw down, to build and to plant."

You see, those aspects were there too and God wanted Baruch to see beyond the destruction and to catch the same vision that He, God Himself, had. God saw beyond the destruction of Jerusalem. He saw the relocation of the throne of David to Ireland and then to Scotland and later on, to England. He saw the migration of the Davidic monarchy. And He saw the building of Israel in the West and ultimately, He saw the time when He Himself would reside forever with His people on the new earth where righteousness would dwell. You can read about that in II Peter 3:13.

God assures us that He has not forgotten His plan for us even though we may have forgotten His promises *to* us.

**Jeremiah 29:11** For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

The Jubilee Bible says, "To give you an end you have waited for." As God would not be deterred with this destruction of empire, neither will He be deterred in bringing about the promises on which we base our hope. Please turn to Jeremiah 42, brethren. Here is an amazing, amazing scripture. It shows how quickly God changed from uprooting mode to planting mode; from overturning mode to building mode.

There are some leaders who come to Jeremiah *just after* the fall of Jerusalem and they said, "Should we stay in this ruined city or should we escape from Nebuchadnezzar and return to Egypt?" And God instructs Jeremiah what to tell the leaders of this very small remnant. Now, this was a remnant made up pretty much of those individuals who the Babylonians considered unfit even to be their slaves. This was the rubbish of the world, the off-scouring of the world; Paul talks about this in I Corinthians 4:13. These were people that the world had rejected. This is a classic example of a remnant. This is us!

These people returned to Egypt and many of them died there. Notice God's answer to the leaders of the remnant:

**Jeremiah 42:10** 'If you still remain in this land, then I will build you and not pull you down, and I will plant you and not pluck you up. For I relent concerning the disaster that I have brought upon you. Do not be afraid of the king of Babylon, of whom you are afraid; do not be afraid of him,' says the Lord, 'for I am with you, to save you and deliver you from his hand.'

You see already, just weeks after the fall of Jerusalem, God was already in planting mode. He states it very clearly there; He had not forgotten His mercy to Israel. Now, He states His long-term plans just a couple of pages over.

**Jeremiah 31:27-28** "The days are coming," says the LOORD, "that I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the offspring of men and of animals. Just as I watched over them to uproot and tear down, and to overthrow, destroy and bring disaster, so I will watch over them to build and to plant," declares the LOORD.

And again, just two more chapters over, Jeremiah 33, God is clearly looking *centuries* into the future here:

**Jeremiah 33:14-16** 'Behold, the days are coming,' says the LOORD, that I will perform that good thing which I have promised to the house of Israel and to the house of Judah: 'In those days and at that time I will cause to grow up to David a Branch of righteousness; He shall execute judgment and righteousness in the earth. In those days Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will dwell in safety.'

Brethren, God is now sun downing this age but He has not forgotten His plan, He has not forgotten His purpose, He has not forgotten the promises of hope which He made to Abraham and to Abraham's descendants forever. Mankind's civilization is convulsing around us in its death throes and we dare not dodge the reality of that fact, and we dare not miss the warning signs. We dare not complain about it and just as importantly, we dare not forget that God promised to us the promise of a future filled with hope. Very soon, brethren, God will plant and build again.