

**BARUCH**



# **INTRODUCTION**

## Introduction

### The text

The Baruch Scroll purports to be written by Baruch<sup>1</sup>, known from the Jeremiah scroll as Jeremiah's secretary (see Jeremiah 36:1-32 and 43:1-7). All the versions we have can be traced back to the Greek Septuagint. The scroll consists of four originally separate compositions. There is no evidence of it ever existing as such in Hebrew, though it is probable that the text we have is a compilation of separate Greek translations from documents originally composed in Hebrew.

### The compiler

The compiler appears to be part of the circle of learned teachers in Jerusalem, devoted to the study and promotion of the traditions of Israel some time early in the second century BC, prior to the Hasmonaean revolt (168BC). Unlike the Book of Daniel, for example, he does not distinguish between the faithful and the unfaithful. He calls on everyone to acknowledge their sinfulness as a people. He also expects redemption to come, not in the afterlife, but through divine intervention in this world

After a prose Introduction (1:1-14), written by the compiler, there is a prose prayer of communal confession of guilt and repentance (1:15 – 3:8). We will note some parallels between 1:15 – 2:19 and Daniel 9:4-19. This is followed by a poem of admonition and exhortation (3:9 – 4:4). The third section is a poem of consolation and encouragement (4:5 – 5:9). It may be a later addition. We will note parallels between 4:36 – 5:9 and the Psalm of Solomon 11:3-8), composed in the first century BC.

The fourth section, the so-called 'Letter of Jeremiah', has no connection with the rest of the scroll. It purports to be a letter from Jeremiah addressed to those who are about to be taken into exile in Babylon. Its focus is on the dangers of being caught up in idolatry while in exile. We treat it here because it is included as chapter 6 of Baruch in the Vulgate Version.

### The Canon of sacred books

Baruch was not included among the authoritative sacred books accepted by the Palestinian Jews. This would be easily explained if the scroll as such never existed in Hebrew. In any case it would not have passed the criterion of being part of the ancient tradition. Though the Book of Daniel, which was included, was composed in the second century BC, it contained quite ancient stories, and purported to be about Daniel, an otherwise unknown prophet of the Babylonian Exile in the sixth century BC. Apart from the Book of Daniel, the most recent books included in the Palestinian canon are the Books of Chronicles composed about the year 300BC.

While Baruch was not included in the official Jewish canon, it was part of the Jewish Greek Version (the Septuagint) and was inherited among the sacred writings by the Christians, though many of the early Christian writers did not include it among the authorised sacred books. Its presence in the Latin Vulgate accounts for its inclusion in the Christian canon.

<sup>1</sup>See also the Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch and the Greek Apocalypse of Baruch

# **PROSE INTRODUCTION 1:1-14**

The ‘historical’ setting

**<sup>1</sup>These are the words of the book that Baruch son of Neriah son of Mahseiah son of Zedekiah son of Hasadiah son of Hilkiyah wrote in Babylon, <sup>2</sup>in the fifth year, on the seventh day of the fifth month, at the time when the Chaldeans took Jerusalem and burned it with fire.**

**<sup>3</sup>Baruch read the words of this book to Jeconiah son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, and to all the people who came to hear the book, <sup>4</sup>and to the nobles and the princes, and to the elders, and to all the people, small and great, all who lived in Babylon by the river Sud.**

**<sup>5</sup>Then they wept, and fasted, and prayed before the Lord; <sup>6</sup>they collected as much money as each could give, <sup>7</sup>and sent it to Jerusalem to the high priest Jehoiakim son of Hilkiyah son of Shallum, and to the priests, and to all the people who were present with him in Jerusalem.**

**<sup>8</sup>At the same time, on the tenth day of Sivan, Baruch took the vessels of the house of the Lord, which had been carried away from the temple, to return them to the land of Judah—the silver vessels that Zedekiah son of Josiah, king of Judah, had made, <sup>9</sup>after King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had carried away from Jerusalem Jeconiah and the princes and the prisoners and the nobles and the people of the land, and brought them to Babylon.**

In the Jeremiah scroll, Baruch is introduced simply as ‘son of Neriah son of Mahseiah’ (Jeremiah 32:12).

It is not clear whether the ‘fifth year’ is in relation to the capture of Jerusalem in 598 (see 2Kings 24:12-16), or its destruction in 587 (see 2Kings 25:1-13), though it seems more likely that the compiler intended the latter date. The temple was burned ‘on the seventh day of the fifth month’ (2Kings 25:8).

Baruch is presented as writing the book in exile in Babylon (verse 2) and reading it to the exiles, among whom was the young king, Jeconiah (throne name Jehoiachin). Jeremiah 43:6-7 says that Baruch was taken to Egypt with Jeremiah. However, it does not say where he died.

‘Sud’ may be a miscopying of ‘Ahava’. God is regularly referred to in Baruch 1:1 – 3:8 as ‘the Lord’. In Baruch 3:9 – 4:4 he is called ‘God’, and in Baruch 4:5 – 5:4 he is regularly referred to as ‘the Eternal’.

This is the only mention of a high priest called Jehoiakim in Jerusalem during the exile (see list in 1Chronicles 6:13-15). We know from Jeremiah 41:4-7 that some cultic activity took place in Jerusalem, even after the destruction of the temple. Deuteronomy 16:16-17 speaks of the obligation of offering monetary support for the carrying out of the cult ‘as much as each can give’.

‘Sivan’ is the Babylonian name for the third month of the Jewish calendar (see Esther 8:9). There is no mention of vessels being returned to Jerusalem prior to 537BC (see Ezra 1:7-11).

The is a covering letter to be sent to the high priest, Jehoiakim, along with the sacred vessels.

The list of different sacrifices is traditional (see Jeremiah 17:26). On ‘burnt offerings’ see Leviticus 1:3-17; 6:9-17. On ‘purification offerings’ see Leviticus 4:1– 5:13; 6:24-30. On ‘incense see Leviticus 4:7; 10:1; 16:12-13. On ‘cereal offering’ see Leviticus 2:1-16; 6:14-23.

Note the encouragement of a positive relationship with their Babylonian masters (compare Jeremiah 29:7 and Ezekiel 29:17-20).

Belshazzar was not the son of Nebuchadnezzar, but of Nabonidus. We find the same mistake in Daniel 5.

Verse 13 introduces the main theme of the book.

Verse 14 seems to imply that the temple is still standing (see earlier comment on verse 2). However, the rest of the scroll certainly implies that it is not, and the author here may be using traditional language, and be speaking of the reduced cult possible after 587.

**<sup>10</sup>They said: Here we send you money; so buy with the money burnt offerings and purification offerings and incense, and prepare a cereal offering, and offer them on the altar of the Lord our God;**

**<sup>11</sup>and pray for the life of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, and for the life of his son Belshazzar, so that their days on earth may be like the days of heaven. <sup>12</sup>The Lord will give us strength, and light to our eyes; we shall live under the protection of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, and under the protection of his son Belshazzar, and we shall serve them many days and find favour in their sight.**

**<sup>13</sup>Pray also for us to the Lord our God, for we have sinned against the Lord our God, and to this day the anger of the Lord and his wrath have not turned away from us.**

**<sup>14</sup>And you shall read aloud this scroll that we are sending you, to make your confession in the house of the Lord on the days of the festivals and at appointed seasons.**

