

BARUCH – SHORT VERSION

Historical context. After the Babylonians successfully invade Judah and destroy Jerusalem in 587 B.C., many Jews are deported to Babylonia, others flee to Egypt, still others remain in the devastated homeland. In 539 B.C. King Cyrus of Persia defeats the Babylonians and establishes Persian rule in that city. In one of the first decrees, Cyrus allows the conquered people to return to their homelands. As a result, Jewish exiles are free to return home.

While many return, many others remain in Babylon. They come to be called the Diaspora. While many of those who remain in Babylon defect from the faith of their ancestors, many others try to remain faithful. They meet in synagogues for worship and learning. In time they come to be known as ‘people of the book.’ They read and study the Mosaic Law and the prophets. In due course, they produce some of their own inspired writings. Among these are Lamentations, Tobit, Esther, Judith, Wisdom, and Baruch. The purpose of Diaspora writings is to help their people hold onto their faith in a pagan land.

Author. Most scholars believe that the book of Baruch, with its diverse types of writing, is a compilation of the works of several authors. It is customary in ancient times to attribute works by unknown writers to more famous authors of previous centuries. Thus many psalms written by nameless authors are attributed to David, and several Wisdom books to Solomon. It seems that the editors of this book felt that it was fitting to attribute their book to Baruch, Jeremiah’s famous secretary.

A deuterocanonical book. Baruch is one of the seven books of the Old Testament not found in the Protestant Canon of Scripture since it is not in the Hebrew version of the Old Testament (see article one for more on this issue). In the Sunday lectionary of readings, only one text from Baruch is found in all three cycles (5:1-9 on the Second Sunday of Advent, Cycle C). We can say that the Book of Baruch could be a guide for people who are separated or lost, physically and

emotionally, from their normal environment. It shows that hope is in the Lord and in the scriptures. It contains a long prayer of lament and exalts wisdom, found in the Torah.

DIVISION OF CHAPTERS

Part 1: Prayer of the exiles (Chapters 1:13 to 3:8)

Part 2: A poem in praise of wisdom (Chapters 3:9 to 4:4)

Part 3: Jerusalem bewails and consoles her captive children (Chapters 4:5 to 5:9)

Part 4: Jeremiah’s letter condemning idolatry (Chapters 6:1 to 7:2)

Suggested texts to read

1:13-22 – The exiles confession of guilt.

5:1-6: This is the first reading on the third Sunday of Advent (Cycle C). Jerusalem is told to remove his clothes of mourning and replace them with “happy clothes”.