

Jeremiah 36:1-8, 21-23, 27-28; 31:31-34

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

36 ¹ In the fourth year of *King Jehoiakim son of Josiah of Judah*, this word came to Jeremiah from the Lord: ² Take a scroll and write on it 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. ³ It may be that when the house of Judah hears of all the disasters that I intend to do to them, all of them may turn from their evil ways, so that I may forgive their iniquity and their sin.

⁴ Then Jeremiah called *Baruch son of Neriah*, and Baruch wrote on a scroll at Jeremiah's dictation all the words of the Lord that he had spoken to him. ⁵ And Jeremiah ordered Baruch, saying, "I am prevented from entering the house of the Lord; ⁶ so you go yourself, and on a fast day in the hearing of the people in the Lord's house you shall read the words of the Lord from the scroll that you have written at my dictation. You shall read them also in the hearing of all the people of Judah who come up from their towns. ⁷ It may be that their plea will come before the Lord, and that all of them will turn from their evil ways, for great is the anger and wrath that the Lord has pronounced against this people." ⁸ And Baruch son of Neriah did all that the prophet Jeremiah ordered him about reading from the scroll the words of the Lord in the Lord's house.

²¹ Then the king sent *Jehudi* to get the scroll, and he took it from the chamber of *Elishama* the secretary; and Jehudi read it to the king and all the officials who stood beside the king. ²² Now the king was sitting in his winter apartment (it was the ninth month), and there was a fire burning in the brazier before him. ²³ As Jehudi read three or four columns, the king would cut them off with a penknife and throw them into the fire in the brazier, until the entire scroll was consumed in the fire that was in the brazier.

²⁷ Now, after the king had burned the scroll with the words that Baruch wrote at Jeremiah's dictation, **the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah:** ²⁸ Take another scroll and write on it all the former words that were in the first scroll, which King Jehoiakim of Judah has burned.

The Book of Jeremiah tells the story of the prophet of the same name, placed places historically in the period from the reforms of king Josiah in 627 BCE through to the assassination of the Babylonian-appointed governor of Judah in 582. Of all the prophets, Jeremiah comes through most clearly as a person, ruminating to his scribe Baruch about his role as a servant of God with little good news for his audience.

Jeremiah is written in a very complex and poetic Hebrew (apart from verse 10:11, curiously written in Biblical Aramaic). The book is a representation of the message and significance of the prophet substantially intended for the Jews in Babylonian exile: its purpose is to explain the disaster as God's response to Israel's pagan worship: the people, says Jeremiah, are like an unfaithful wife and rebellious children: their infidelity and rebelliousness make judgement inevitable, although restoration and a new covenant are foreshadowed. [adapted from the Wikipedia entry on Jeremiah]

King Jehoiakim son of Josiah of Judah:: Jehoiakim (c. 635–598 BCE) was a king of Judah for 13 years, from 608 to 598 BCE. He was the eldest son of king Josiah by Zebidah. After his father's death, his younger brother Jehoahaz was first proclaimed king, but after three months the Egyptian pharaoh Necho II (who controlled Israel/Palestine then) deposed him, making Jehoiakim king in his place in 608 BCE. Jehoiakim ruled originally as a vassal of the Egyptians, paying a heavy tribute. To raise the money he "taxed the land and exacted the silver and gold from the people of the land according to their assessments."

However, after the Egyptians were defeated by the Babylonians at the battle of Carchemish in 605 BCE, Nebuchadnezzar II besieged Jerusalem, and Jehoiakim changed allegiances (from the Egyptians to the Babylonians) to avoid the destruction of Jerusalem. He paid tribute from the treasury in Jerusalem, some temple artifacts, and handed over some of the royal family and nobility as hostages.

Rabbinical literature describes Jehoiakim as a godless tyrant who committed atrocious sins and crimes. He is portrayed as living in incestuous relations with his mother, daughter-in-law, and stepmother, and was in the habit of murdering men, whose wives he then violated and whose property he seized. He also had tattooed his body (which violates the Law). Jeremiah criticised the king's policies, insisting on repentance and strict adherence to the law.

Jehoiakim continued for three years as a vassal to the Babylonians, until the failure of an invasion of Egypt in 601 BCE undermined their control of the area. Jehoiakim switched allegiance back to the Egyptians. In late 598 BCE, the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar II invaded Judah and again laid siege to Jerusalem, which lasted three months. Jehoiakim died before the siege ended and his body was thrown outside the city walls. He was succeeded by his son whom the victorious Nebuchadnezzar deposed in order to install Zedekiah, Jehoiakim's younger brother, as king in his place. Jeconiah (who initially succeeded his dad as king), his household, and much of Judah's population were exiled to Babylon.

31 ³¹ The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a *new covenant* with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. ³² It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. ³³ But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put **my law** within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ³⁴ No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, “Know the Lord,” for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

Questions for the Practice of Examen & Contemplation

Jeremiah is one of the most literarily beautiful writings of the Bible. Its beauty comes from the language and also the promise that despite disobedience, doubt and even deceit on the part of the Israelites, God remains faithful. It's a promise we read as extending to us as well. How do you identify God's faithfulness? How do you respond to God's steadfast presence in your life?

The story of Jeremiah is one of disappointment and unexpected hope. How are you surprised by unexpected hope today? How are you possibly mired in disappointment, frustration or fear which keep you from seeing God at work in your world?

Chapter 31 of Jeremiah is very often quoted as a promise for us today. And yet it was spoken, or written, by a prophet at a particular moment, to specific people in a unique context: the Israelites over 2,500 years ago as they were being invaded, conquered and exiled by the Babylonians. They didn't just doubt God's presence, they were experiencing their extinction. How can we say that it's a word for us today in 2016 as well? How do you approach the divine promises of the Bible in terms of your life?

Baruch son of Neriah:: Baruch ben Neriah (his Hebrew name means: בן ברוך "Blessed, son of My Candle is God" Living in the 6th century BCE, he was the scribe, disciple, secretary, and devoted friend of the Biblical prophet Jeremiah.]

According to the Jewish historian Josephus, Baruch was a Jewish aristocrat, a son of Neriah and brother of Seraiah ben Neriah, chamberlain of King Zedekiah of Judah. He became the scribe of the prophet Jeremiah and wrote down the first and second editions of his prophecies as they were dictated to him. Baruch remained true to the teachings and ideals of the great prophet, although like his master he was at times almost overwhelmed with despondency. While Jeremiah was in hiding to avoid the wrath of King Jehoakim, he commanded Baruch to read his prophecies of warning to the people gathered in the Temple in Jerusalem on a day of fasting. The task was both difficult and dangerous, but Baruch performed it without flinching and it was probably on this occasion that the prophet gave him the personal message.

Both Baruch and Jeremiah witnessed the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem of 587–586 BC. In the middle of the siege of Jerusalem, Jeremiah purchased estate in Anathoth on which the Babylonian armies had encamped (as a symbol of faith in the eventual restoration of Jerusalem), and, according to Josephus, Baruch continued to reside with him at Mizpah.

He was carried with Jeremiah to Egypt, where, according to a tradition preserved by the 4th century Roman priest Jerome (who is credited with translating the Bible into Latin (called the Vulgate), he soon died.

JEHUDI: was most likely a prince, member of the royal court, sent as a messenger or “errand boy” by the king

Elishama: a scribe in the King's court

the word of the Lord came to: This is the traditional way in which the Hebrew Scriptures introduce prophets and explain their authority as conduits of God's judgment.

new covenant:: In the ancient middle east a covenant was a formal agreement that caused (or implied) several things: 1) It defined (or sometimes created) a relationship. This relationship might be between a king and his vassal states, between a deity and his nation, between two humans, etc. 2. Some covenants are conditional (if one party does A, then the other party will do B), just as with a present-day contract. But generally, ancient covenants are unconditional (each party commits to a certain action, regardless of whether the other party keeps the covenant); 3. they often included the slaughter of animals as a symbol of their significance.; 4. Unlike present-day contracts, covenants often carried no expiration date. Thus the parties were understood to be bound by the covenant until death (or forever, in the case of covenants with God); 5. Whereas a contract is enforced by the civil government; a covenant is regulated by God' 6. A contract involves the exchange of property or actions; a covenant binds two parties together personally. In brief it was a relational connection and commitment. In Jeremiah it's God rearticulated the divine commitment to Israel, despite appearances.