



BARUCH

The book of Baruch was among the last books of the Bible to be written. It was written during the last century before Christ, in one of the Jewish communities outside of Palestine.

It includes several texts helpful to the dispersed Jews:

- a “prayer of the exiles” which intensified their longing for the Holy Land;
- a beautiful poem about wisdom (3:9—4:4);
- several texts inspired by the prophets of the exile;
- a “letter from Jeremiah,” which is a controversial text against idols (Bar 6).

Because it included some paragraphs written in Jeremiah’s style, it was attributed to Baruch, the prophet’s secretary (see Jer 36).

The prayer of exiles

1 ¹These are the words of the book written by Baruch, the son of Neriah, descended from Massiah, from Sedekiah, from Hasadiah, from Hilkiyah. ²They were written in the fifth year, on the seventh day of the month, at the time when the Chaldeans had taken Jerusalem and burned it.

³Baruch read the words of this book to Jeconiah, the son of Joachim, the king of Judah, in the presence of all the people who had come together to hear it read. ⁴He read it in the hearing of the nobles and the king’s sons, of the elders and all the people, from the smallest to the greatest – that is, all those who were living in Babylon near the River Sudi.

⁵Then the people wept and fasted and prayed before the Lord. ⁶They also collected money according to what each one could afford ⁷and this they sent to Jerusalem, to the priest Jehoiakim, son of Hilkiyah, the son of Shallum, and to the other priests and people who dwelt in Jerusalem with him. ⁸This same Baruch had undertaken to carry back to Judea, on the tenth day of the month of Sivan, the sacred vessels which had been taken away from the Temple of the Lord. These were the silver vessels made by Zedekiah, son of Josiah, king of Judah, ⁹after Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, had carried off Jeconiah, the artisans, the nobles

and the people of the land and had taken them captive to Babylon.

¹⁰The letter said: Look, we are sending you money; buy with it victims for the holocaust and for sin offerings and incense; prepare oblations and offer them on the Altar of the Lord our God. ¹¹Pray for the life of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, and of Balthasar, his son, so that they may be successful in all that they do. ¹²Thus the Lord will give strength and light to our eyes. We will live under the protection of Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, and of his son, Balthasar. We shall have a long life serving them and we shall find favor before them.

¹³Pray to the Lord our God for us also, for we have sinned against the Lord our God, even to this day the anger of the Lord and his fury have not been turned away from us. ¹⁴Finally, read this book which we are sending to you, so that you can read it publicly in the House of the Lord on the day of the Feast and on other suitable days.

¹⁵You will say: May everyone recognize the justice of our God but, on this day, shame and confusion befit the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem – ¹⁶our kings and princes, our priests, our prophets, and our fathers, ¹⁷because we have sinned before the Lord. ¹⁸We have disobeyed him and have not listened to the voice of the Lord our God, nor

Jer
17:26

Dn
9:7
Ezra
9:7

2K
23:2
24:8-
17

have we followed the commandments which the Lord had put before us. ¹⁹From the day that the Lord brought our ancestors out of the land of Egypt until this day, we have disobeyed the Lord our God and we have rebelled against him instead of listening to his voice.

^{Lev 26:14-39} ²⁰Because of this, from the day on which the Lord brought our ancestors out of the land of Egypt, so as to give them a land flowing with milk and honey, the evils and the curse which the Lord pronounced by Moses, his servant, have dogged our footsteps right down to the present day. ²¹We did not listen to the voice of the Lord our God speaking through the words of the prophets whom he sent to us, ²²but each one of us followed his perverted heart, serving false gods and doing what displeases the Lord our God.

2 ¹That is why the Lord our God has carried out the word which he spoke against us, against the judges who have governed Israel, against our kings, our princes and the people of Israel and Judah.

²No one under the sky has ever seen the like of what happened in Jerusalem, according to what is written in the book of Moses.

^{Tb 3:4} ³For people among us came to eat their son's and daughter's flesh. ⁴And he handed them over into the power of all the surrounding kingdoms, so that they were cursed and humiliated among the neighboring peoples among whom the Lord had scattered them.

^{Dt 28:13} ⁵Submission and not command has been our lot, because we have sinned against the Lord our God and have not listened to his voice.

⁶Just is the Lord our God, whereas shame and confusion befit us and our ancestors right down to this day. ⁷All those evils which the Lord prophesied concerning us have fallen upon us. ⁸And we have not begged the Lord to make each of us turn away from the thoughts of our evil hearts. ⁹Then the Lord kept watch over the evils and allowed them to come upon us, for the Lord is just in all that he has commanded us to do. ¹⁰We have not listened to his voice nor followed the commands which the Lord has ordered us to keep.

^{Dn 9:15-16} ¹¹And now, Lord God of Israel, you who brought your people out of Egypt with a strong hand, with miracles and wonders and great power, you who stretched out your arm and made for yourself a name such as you have today, ¹²we have sinned. We have been godless and unjust, Lord, careless about all your commands. ¹³May your fury be turned away from us, for there are very few of us left among the nations in which you have scattered us.

¹⁴Hear our supplication and our prayer, O Lord, deliver us for your own honor and let us find favor with those who deported us. ¹⁵Let

all the earth know that you are the Lord our God, because Israel and its people bear your name. ¹⁶Lord, look down from your holy dwelling place and think of us; Lord, incline your ear and listen; ¹⁷Lord, open your eyes and consider: it is not the dead, lying in the netherworld, who will praise your glory and justice, ¹⁸since their spirit has been taken from their breast. Grieving under his burden, and walking bowed down and exhausted, the man with eyes sore from weeping and who is hungry – these are they, who can give you glory and justice, O Lord.

¹⁹For it is not on account of the merits of our ancestors and of our kings that we pour out our cry for pity before you, O Lord our God. ²⁰You have sent down on us your fury and your anger as you announced through your servants, the prophets, saying, ²¹“Thus says the Lord: Bend your shoulders and serve the king of Babylon and you will dwell in the land that I gave to your ancestors. ²²But if you do not listen to the voice of the Lord your God and serve the king of Babylon, ²³I will bring to an end in the towns of Judah and in Jerusalem the song of joy and gladness, the song of the bridegroom and the bride, and the whole country will become a desert without inhabitants. ²⁴We did not listen to your invitation to serve the king of Babylon and so you carried out what you had foretold by your servants, the prophets, that the bones of our kings and our ancestors would be taken from their graves. ²⁵See, they have been exposed to the heat of the day and the cold of the night; they died in cruel sufferings, by famine, by the sword and by plagues. ²⁶And you have reduced the nation which bears your name to the state in which it is today because of the wickedness of the people of Judah.

²⁷However, you have acted towards us, O Lord our God, indulgently and with great tenderness, ²⁸as you foretold by your servant Moses, the day you ordered him to write down your Law in the presence of the children of Israel saying: ²⁹If you do not listen to my voice, this great and vast multitude will be reduced to a small remnant among the nations where I shall scatter them; ³⁰for I know well that they will not listen to me because they are a stiff-necked people. But in the land of their exile their hearts will be converted ³¹and they will know that I am the Lord their God. ³²And I will give them a heart and listening ears, that they may praise me in the land of their exile and remember my name. ³³They will repent of their stiff-necked obstinacy and their evil deeds, because they will remember what happened to their ancestors who had sinned before the Lord. ³⁴And I will lead them into the land which I have promised by oath to their ancestors, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and they will take possession of it.

Dn 9:18
Tit 3:5

Jer 27:11-12

Jer 7:34

Jer 8:1-2

Dt 4:27

Ex 32:9

Dt 30:5

I will increase their number and it will no longer diminish. ³⁵I will make with them an everlasting covenant; I will be their God and they shall be my people. I will no longer drive my people Israel from the land which I have given them.

3 ¹Almighty Lord, God of Israel, a soul in anguish and a discouraged spirit cries out to you. ²Listen, Lord, and have pity for we have sinned against you; ³for you reign forever while we perish forever. ⁴Lord, all-powerful God of Israel, listen then to the prayers of the dead of Israel. We are the sons of those who sinned against you, who did not listen to the voice of their God, and this is why disgrace has come upon us. ⁵Do not remember any longer the wrongdoing of our fathers, but remember at this time your power and your name; ⁶for you are the Lord, our God and we will praise you, Lord. ⁷That is why you have put your fear into our hearts and we call upon your name. And we will praise you in our exile for we have removed from our hearts all the wrong of our fathers who sinned against you. ⁸We are here today in our exile where you have scattered us to be insulted, cursed and condemned for the wrongdoing of our fathers, who separated themselves from the Lord our God.

Who has found wisdom?

• ⁹Listen, Israel, to the commands of life, give ear so as to learn prudence,
¹⁰Why, Israel! Why are you in the land of your foes? Why are you growing old in a foreign country, contaminated by pagans,
¹¹counted among those who go to the pit?
¹²You have abandoned the source of Wisdom.
¹³If you had walked in the way of God, peace would be your dwelling place forever.
¹⁴Learn where is Wisdom, where is Strength and Understanding, that you may know, at the same time, where are length of days and life, light of the eyes and Peace.
¹⁵Who will find Wisdom's dwelling? Who will enter her storage rooms?
¹⁶Where are the leaders of the nations, those who commanded the beasts of the earth,
¹⁷who played with the birds of the heavens,

Jer 31:31

Hos 9:4

Dt 4:6
Pro 2:1
3:2

Job 28:12, 20
Sir 1:6

Dn 2:38

who piled up silver and gold – in which people put their trust – and who never tired of collecting it?

¹⁸Amassing money was their only concern, their business beyond measure. ¹⁹But they have disappeared, they have gone down to the dead and others have risen in their place. ²⁰A younger generation is there on the earth and enjoys the light, but they have not known the ways of knowledge; they have not seen his tracks nor have they met him, ²¹and their children after them did not leave their paths.

²²No one in Canaan has heard of Wisdom, no one has seen her in Teman.

²³The sons of Agar, who seek knowledge of the earth, the traders of Madian and Teman, the tellers of fables and philosophers, they have not known the path of Wisdom, they have not discovered her ways.

²⁴O Israel, how great is the house of God, how vast his dominion!

²⁵It is great and has no limits. It is lofty, wide and immeasurable.

²⁶There were born the ancient and famous giants of high stature and skillful in war.

²⁷God did not choose them, he did not teach them the ways of Wisdom,

²⁸and they perished because of their folly, because they lacked knowledge.

²⁹Who has ascended to Heaven that he may lay hold of her

and bring her down from the clouds?
³⁰Who has crossed seas and found her, and bought her with the purest of gold?

³¹There is no one who knows her path, no one who thinks of her way.

³²But he who knows everything recognizes her.

He has found her in his own intellect. He who created the earth, for all time, and has filled it with four-footed beings.

³³He who sends the light, and it goes, who recalls it, and trembling it obeys.

³⁴The stars shine, full of joy, to keep their night watches.

He calls them and they answer, "Here we are."

Jer 49:7

Dt 30:11-13

Sir 24:4

Job 28:23

Sir 43:9

Ps 147:4

• **3.9** This poem is inspired by chapter 28 of Job.

The author addresses believers who are very impressed by the culture and material wealth of the pagans among whom they live. He reminds them that authentic human wisdom is not mere technical knowledge, nor is it the art of making money or pure human reflection. Wisdom con-

sists in knowing what is God's plan in creating this world. What does God ask of humankind?

For Jewish believers, true wisdom was found in God's words, in their "Law." In their turn, Christians know that the wisdom ruling the universe is none other than the one known in the words and the person of Jesus.

They shine with joy for their Creator.

³⁵It is he who is our God, no other can be compared with him.

³⁶He has found the way of understanding and has given her to Jacob his servant and to Israel his well-beloved.

^{Pro}
^{8:31} ³⁷Then Wisdom was seen on earth and lived among humans.

^{Sir}
^{24:23} **4** ¹She herself is the book of the commands of God, the law which endures forever.

All who hold fast to her will have life but those who abandon her will die.

^{Sir}
^{45:5} ²Come back, Jacob, and embrace her, walk towards brightness under her light.

³Do not give up what is your glory or sell your privileges to any strange nation.

⁴We are fortunate, O Israel, for we know what pleases the Lord!

Consolation for Jerusalem

⁵Take courage, my people, you who preserve the memory of Israel. ⁶You have been sold to the nations but not for your destruction; because you had aroused the anger of God, you were delivered to your enemies.

^{Dt}
^{32:17} ⁷For you displeased your Creator in sacrificing to demons and not to God. ⁸You have forgotten the Eternal God, the one who nourished you. You have filled Jerusalem with sadness, she who brought you up. ⁹For she saw the anger of God fall on you and she said, "Listen, you neighboring cities of Zion, God has sent me a great sorrow. ¹⁰I have seen the captivity of my sons and daughters, which the Eternal one brought on them. ¹¹I had nurtured them in joy; with tears and sadness I saw them leave. ¹²Let no one rejoice on seeing me a widow and abandoned by all. Because of the sins of my children I am now alone, because they have turned away from the law of God.

^{Is}
^{49:21} ¹³They have not remembered its precepts; nor have they walked in the ways of his commandments, and followed the discipline which leads to uprightness.

¹⁴Let them come, the neighbors of Zion, and remember the captivity which the Eternal One laid on my sons and daughters.

^{Jer}
^{5:15} ¹⁵For he caused a distant nation to come against them, a ruthless nation with an unknown language.

They had no respect for the old, and no pity for the infant; ¹⁶they took away the only son of the widow, as well as her daughter, and left her alone.

¹⁷But as for myself, how can I help you?

¹⁸He who caused these evils to come upon

you will deliver you from the hands of your enemies.

¹⁹Well, my children, go on your way; as for me, I am left alone.

²⁰I have taken off the garment of peace and put on again the sackcloth of penance and prayer. I will cry out to the Eternal One all the rest of my days.

²¹Come, take courage, my children, cry out to God. He will deliver you from the violence of the enemy.

²²Because I hoped for your salvation from the Eternal One, joy has come to me from the Holy One, because of the mercy that will come to you soon from the Eternal One, our Savior.

²³In tears and mourning, I saw you leave, but in joy and gladness God will bring you back to me forever.

²⁴As the neighbors of Zion have seen your captivity so they will soon see your salvation from God, when he manifests to you the great glory and the splendor of the Eternal God.

²⁵Children, bear patiently this punishment which came on you from God. The enemy has persecuted you, but you will soon see his downfall and you will trample him underfoot. ^{Ps}
110:1

²⁶My well-beloved children have walked by difficult paths, carried off like a herd stolen by enemies. ²⁷Take courage, my children, cry out to God, for he who sent you into exile will remember you.

²⁸Thus, as you distanced yourself from God, return to him and seek him ten times more earnestly. ²⁹For he who caused these evils to fall on you will bring you salvation and eternal joy.

³⁰Take courage, Jerusalem. He who has named you will console you. ^{Is}
40:1

³¹Cursed be those who did evil to you and rejoiced in your downfall. ³²Cursed be those cities in which your children were slaves, cursed the nation in which they had to live.

³³Just as that nation rejoiced in your downfall and took pleasure in your destruction so will she be afflicted and destroyed.

³⁴I will take from her the joy of being a numerous people; her pride will be turned into mourning.

• ³⁵A fire will descend on her from the Eternal One and burn for many days. She will be inhabited by demons for a long time.

³⁶Jerusalem, look towards the East, and see the joy which is coming to you from God.

³⁷Look, your children who were scattered are returning. They are assembling, coming together, from the East and from the West, at ^{Is}
43:5

• 4.35 Following the laments of verses 5-35, note the ending filled with hope and joy (4:36-5:9) which resembles chapters 60-62 of Isaiah.

the voice of the Holy One, rejoicing in the glory of God.

5 ¹Jerusalem, put off your garment of mourning and unhappiness, put on the splendor and glory of God forever.

²Wrap yourself in the mantle of holiness that comes from God, put on your head the crown of glory of the Eternal One.

³For God will show your splendor to every being under Heaven.

⁴He will call your name forever, "Peace in Justice" and "Glory in the Fear of the Lord."

⁵Rise up, Jerusalem, stand on the heights. Look towards the East and see your children gathered together from the setting of the sun to its rising, by the voice of the Holy One, rejoicing because God has remembered them.

⁶They left you on foot, taken away by the enemy. God will lead them back, carried gloriously like royal princes.

⁷For God has resolved to bring low every high mountain and the everlasting hills, to fill up the valleys and level out the ground, in order that Israel may walk in safety under the Glory of God.

⁸Even the forests and the fragrant trees will give shade to Israel at God's command. ⁹For God will lead Israel with joy by the light of his Glory, escorting them with his mercy and justice.

The Letter of Jeremiah

6 • *A copy of the letter which Jeremiah sent to those who were to be taken captive to Babylon by the king of the Babylonians, to let them know what God had ordered him.*

¹"Because of the sins you have committed against God, you will be led captive to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar, king of the Babylonians. ²After your arrival in Babylon you will remain there for a number of years – a long time, for seven generations; but after that I shall bring you home in peace.

³In Babylon you will see gods of silver, gold and wood, carried on men's shoulders and filling the people with fear. ⁴Take care not to copy what foreigners do and not to let yourselves be terrified by them ⁵when you see the crowds pressing in front and behind to adore them. ⁶Say rather to yourselves: 'Master, it is you we are to adore.' My angel is with you to take care of your lives.

⁷Their tongues have been polished by a craftsman and even if they are of gold and silver, they are false and are unable to speak.

⁸As for a maiden conscious of her appearance, these pagans make golden crowns for their gods. ⁹Yet at times the priests steal the gold and silver from their gods for their own use and for the prostitutes in their temples.

¹⁰They give clothes to these gods as if they were people, but they are only things of gold, silver and wood, which cannot defend themselves from rust or woodworm. ¹¹So, after clothing them in purple, they wipe their faces because of the thick dust of the temple that covers them.

¹²The god has a scepter like a governor of a province, but he cannot destroy the person who has wronged him. ¹³He carries sword and axe in his right hand, but he is helpless both in war and against thieves. ¹⁴This clearly proves they are not gods; have no fear of them.

¹⁵A broken pot is useless for anyone. So are those gods enshrined in their temples. ¹⁶Their eyes are full of the dust raised by those who enter. ¹⁷Just as doors are carefully closed on a man who has offended the king or on a convict sentenced to death, in the same way the priests lock and bolt the doors of the temple for fear of thieves. ¹⁸They light lamps, far more numerous than what they need for themselves, and yet the god sees no one. ¹⁹He is no more than any of the beams of the temple and some whisper that the inner part is gnawed by termites; worms out of the ground devour both the god and his clothes, but he feels nothing. ²⁰Their faces have become black because of the smoke of the temple. ²¹Owls alight on their heads and shoulders, swallows and other birds perch on them and cats prowl around them. ²²This tells you they are not gods, so have no fear of them.

²³If the rust on the gold that adorns them is not removed, they cannot shine. Yet what does it matter? Even when they were cast they felt nothing. ²⁴They may be bought at a high price but there is not a breath of life in them. ²⁵As they are without feet, they are carried on men's shoulders, showing publicly their shame. What a confusion for their worshipers if the god falls! They must lift him up. ²⁶Once he has been stood up, he does not move. If tilted, he is helpless to straighten up. So you make offerings to these gods as you make to dead people.

²⁷The priests collect what has been offered for sacrifice, selling it, while the wives salt some of it but give nothing to the poor and helpless. Do you think these are true offerings? Even women giving birth or who are

• **6.1** This discourse also serves as a warning for us against exaggerated devotion to the saints and too much interest in religious images. In the midst of so many considerations which

may seem tedious to us, note the judgment expressed in verses 27 and 37: a religion which shows no concern for orphans and widows is a false religion.

ritually unclean touch them. ²⁸ See that they are not gods and have no fear of them.

²⁹ How can they be called gods? Women carry offerings to things made of silver, wood and gold. ³⁰ The priests remain seated in the temple, their garments torn, head and beard shaved, and no covering on their heads. ³¹ They roar and cry in the presence of their gods as do certain people during funeral meals. ³² With the garments taken from the gods the priests clothe their wives and their children. ³³ Whether they are treated well or shabbily, the gods can make no return, neither can they make or unmake a king. ³⁴ They are incapable of bestowing riches or money. If someone fails to keep a vow, he is not called to account. ³⁵ They can neither save anyone from death nor rescue a helpless person from the clutch of the powerful. ³⁶ They cannot restore sight to the blind or save someone in distress. ³⁷ They will show no compassion to the widow nor do good to the orphan.

Wis
16:13

Ps
146:7

³⁸ These pieces of wood plated with gold and silver are no more worthy than rocks hewn out of a mountain and their worshipers shall be humiliated. ³⁹ How then can anyone believe they are gods? How can they be called gods?

⁴⁰ The Chaldeans themselves have put them to shame. If they see someone who is dumb, unable to speak, they bring him before Bel, entreating him to make him speak, as if the god could hear them! ⁴¹ And yet these thinking people are unable to abandon gods that are completely devoid of sense. ⁴² Women with cord round their waists sit in the street burning bran. ⁴³ When one of them has been picked up by a passerby and has slept with him, she taunts her companion for not having been so highly regarded as herself and for failing to have her cord broken. ⁴⁴ All that goes on anywhere near these gods is false. How can they be considered or declared to be gods?

⁴⁵ They have been fashioned by craftsmen and goldsmiths; they are nothing more than what the artisans decided they were to be. ⁴⁶ Those who made them haven't long to live; so how could the work of their hands be gods? ⁴⁷ What they leave to their descendants is nothing more than illusion and shame.

⁴⁸ For when war or other disasters come upon them, they discuss among themselves where they, with their gods, will hide. ⁴⁹ How could anyone fail to be convinced that what cannot save from war and disaster is not a god? ⁵⁰ Later on, these pieces of wood plated with silver and gold will be known to be false. It will be plain to all kings and nations that

they are not gods, but merely the work of human hands and God does nothing through them. ⁵¹ Is there anyone unconvinced that these are not gods?

⁵² They are incapable of establishing a king in a country or of sending rain to people. ⁵³ They are unable to discern what is just or to rescue a person who has been wronged. They are as helpless as crows between the sky and the ground. ⁵⁴ When fire breaks out in the temple of these wooden gods plated with silver and gold, the priests flee to safety but their gods are burnt with the beams in the midst of the flames. ⁵⁵ They can neither resist a king nor a hostile army. ⁵⁶ How can it be admitted or believed that they are gods?

⁵⁷ These gods cannot escape either from thieves or brigands. These are more powerful and despoil them of their gold, their silver and their robes. Such gods are unable to defend themselves.

⁵⁸ Better to be a king with a show of power, or even a household pot that is of some use to its owner than to be a false god; better even to be the door of a house that guards what is within, or a wooden column in a royal palace than to be a false god. ⁵⁹ The sun, moon and stars that shine and serve us are obedient to God; ⁶⁰ likewise the lightning that is beautiful to see, and the wind that blows over the country ⁶¹ and the clouds passing over the earth at God's command, fire sent from on high to consume mountain and forest – all do what is commanded. ⁶² But these wooden objects can in no way compare with them, ⁶³ that is why it must not be either believed or said that these are gods, since they are powerless to administer justice or benefit anyone in any way. ⁶⁴ Since you know they are not gods, have no fear of them.

⁶⁵ They can neither curse ⁶⁶ nor bless kings, nor bring about signs in the heavens for the nations to see. They can neither shine like the sun nor give light like the moon. ⁶⁷ Animals are of more worth, since by taking cover they can look after themselves. ⁶⁸ So in no way whatever is it evident to us that these are gods; for that reason have no fear of them.

⁶⁹ For like a scarecrow in a field of melons, these gods plated with silver and gold protect nothing. ⁷⁰ Again these wooden gods may be compared to a thornbush in a garden where any bird can perch, or to a corpse thrown into a dark place. ⁷¹ You know by the purple and scarlet robes rotting on them that they are not gods. They end up by being eaten away and become a disgrace to the country. ⁷² Better than a just man who has no idols, he will not be dishonored.

Gen
1:14
Sir
43:17