

A Prophet in the Shadows

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On September 28 we remember the Prophet Baruch. He was the stalwart friend and secretary of the much more prominent and often-quoted prophet Jeremiah.

It was no small thing to be Jeremiah's companion and scribe. Not only did Baruch laboriously write thousands of words of prophecy dictated by his master, he also read the words that Jeremiah had "spoken against Israel and Judah and all the nations" to the very people against whom he had spoken them.

The 36th chapter of the Book of Jeremiah says that Baruch wrote on a papyrus scroll the warnings Jeremiah heard from God, telling the people of Jerusalem and Judah to turn from their evil ways. Then, at Jeremiah's direction, he read the scroll publicly in the Temple at Jerusalem, facing the very people who were accused by God of wrongdoing.

A group of royal officials asked Baruch to read the scroll again, privately, to them. They asked him how he had come to write the words, and he replied that Jeremiah had dictated them. The danger Baruch and his master faced is made clear by the officials' instructions to Baruch: "Go and hide, you and Jeremiah, and let no one know where you are" (36:19).

The king, Jehoiakim, also wanted to hear what was in the scroll. Sitting by a fire, he had a courtier named Jehudi read it, column by column. As Jehudi finished reading a column, the king would cut it off with a penknife and throw it into the fire. Not only did Jehoiakim refuse to heed God's warnings, but Baruch had to write the whole scroll, with more words added, all over again.

The disobedience of the kings and people finally led to the fall of Jerusalem. In Jeremiah 39: 6-8 we read the grim results: "The king of Babylon slew the sons of Zedekiah [the king of Judah at that time] at Riblah before his eyes; and the king of Babylon slew all the nobles of Judah. He put out the eyes of Zedekiah and bound him in fetters to take him to Babylon. The Chaldeans burned the king's house and the house of the people, and broke down the walls of Jerusalem."

Troparion - Tone 8

You were worthy of the light of prophecy
Becoming a companion to Jeremiah.
You foretold the self-emptying of God the Word
Which he wrought for the salvation of the world.
Now all heirs of his kingdom honor you, O holy Prophet Baruch!

Baruch stood loyally by Jeremiah as the great prophet was imprisoned and persecuted. With Jeremiah, he grieved at the fall of Jerusalem. But we don't remember Baruch only as a witness to disheartening events. He also is a prophet, and in his writings we read: "This is our God; no other can be compared to him! He found the way to knowledge, and gave her to Jacob his servant and to Israel whom he loved. Afterward she appeared upon earth and lived among men" (Baruch 3:35-37). The Church Fathers saw in this a prophecy of the coming of Christ.