

OpenTheo

February 15th: Jeremiah 45 & 2 Corinthians 12:14–13:14

February 14, 2021



Alastair Roberts

Baruch's colophon. Preparing for Paul's third visit.

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

If you have enjoyed my output, please tell your friends. If you are interested in supporting my videos and podcasts and my research more generally, please consider supporting my work on Patreon (<https://www.patreon.com/zugzwanged>), using my PayPal account (<https://bit.ly/2RLaUcB>), or by buying books for my research on Amazon (https://www.amazon.co.uk/hz/wishlist/ls/36WVSWCK4X33O?ref_=wl_share).

The audio of all of my videos is available on my Soundcloud account: <https://soundcloud.com/alastairadversaria>. You can also listen to the audio of these episodes on iTunes: <https://itunes.apple.com/gb/podcast/alastairs-adversaria/id1416351035?mt=2>.

Transcript

Jeremiah chapter 45. The word that Jeremiah the prophet spoke to Beruk the son of Neriah when he wrote these words in a book at the dictation of Jeremiah in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Jeziah king of Judah. Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, to you, O Beruk, you said, Woe is me, for the Lord has added sorrow to my pain.

I am weary with my groaning, and I find no rest. Thus shall you say to him, Thus says the Lord, Behold, what I have built I am breaking down, and what I have planted I am plucking up, that is, the whole land. And do you seek great things for yourself? Seek them not, for behold, I am bringing disaster upon all flesh, declares the Lord.

But I will give you your life as a prize of war in all places to which you may go. Jeremiah chapter 45, a very short chapter, is a colophon. It is appended to the part of the book from chapter 36 to 44, known by some as the Beruk document.

The colophon form gives us, as Jack Lumbum notes, the name of the scribe with his patronym, he is the son of Neriah. It gives us the source of the copy, that was dictated by Jeremiah. It gives us the date, the fourth year of Jehoiakim, the reason for producing the copy, a curse and a blessing, and the catch word of sorrow that connects it with other parts of the book.

We find a further colophon in chapter 51 verses 59 to 64, the word that Jeremiah the prophet commanded Sariah, the son of Neriah, son of Messiah, when he went with Zedekiah, king of Judah, to Babylon, in the fourth year of his reign. Sariah was the quartermaster. Jeremiah wrote in a book all the disaster that should come upon Babylon, all these words that are written concerning Babylon.

And Jeremiah said to Sariah, when you come to Babylon, see that you read all these words, and say, O Lord, you have said concerning this place that you will cut it off, so that nothing shall dwell in it, neither man nor beast, and it shall be desolate for ever. When you finish reading this book, tie a stone to it, and cast it into the midst of the Euphrates, and say, Thus shall Babylon sink, to rise no more, because of the disaster that I am bringing upon her, and they shall become exhausted. Thus far are the words of Jeremiah.

The book of Jeremiah passed through a number of different stages before coming to us in its present form. The Septuagint is evidence of rather different forms that the book of Jeremiah circulated in. Even within Jeremiah's own lifetime, when his ministry was still ongoing, there were initial editions of the book being produced, as we see in chapter 36, verses 1 to 8. In the fourth year of Jehoiakim, the son of Jeziel, king of Judah, this word came to Jeremiah from the Lord.

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 Jeziel until today. It may be that the house of Judah will hear all the disaster that I intend to do to them, so that every one may turn from his evil way, and that I may forgive their iniquity and their sin. Then Jeremiah called Beruk the son of Noriah, and Beruk wrote on a scroll at the dictation of Jeremiah all the words of the Lord that he had spoken to him.

And Jeremiah ordered Beruk, saying, I am banned from going to the house of the Lord, so you are to go, and on a day of fasting, in the hearing of all 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 men of Judah who come out of their cities. It may be that their plea for mercy will come before the Lord, and that every one will turn from his evil way, for great is the anger and wrath that the Lord has pronounced against his people.

And Beruk the son of Noriah did all that Jeremiah the prophet ordered him about reading from the scroll the words of the Lord in the Lord's house. Beruk is associated with

Jeremiah back in the time of Jehoiakim. As the preceding chapters show, his association continued down into the exile in Egypt, as Beruk was taken with Jeremiah to that exile.

Beruk was also the brother of Saraiah who is mentioned later on. Like the family of Shaphan, the sons of Saraiah are important allies to Jeremiah. This chapter is dated back to 605 BC, to the fourth year of Jehoiakim, long before the post 586 BC period that the previous chapters recount.

Lumbom argues that it had originally functioned to end the earlier form of the book, the production of which was described back in chapter 36. This earlier edition would have been chapters 1 to 20. In support of this position, Lumbom argues that the catch word of sorrow connects these verses with the final verse of chapters 1 to 20, verse 18 of chapter 20.

Why did I come out from the womb to see toil and sorrow and spend my days in shame? Jeremiah ends chapters 1 to 20 with a lament that harkens back to his call in chapter 1. And Beruk's colophon records a very similar lament and connects his suffering with that of the prophets that he is working for. Beruk is a servant of this prophecy and his personal destiny is entangled with it in complicated ways. Verse 4 also recalls the opening of the book.

Thus shall you say to him, thus says the Lord, behold what I have built I am breaking down and what I have planted I am plucking up, that is the whole land. The familiar set of terms here, build, break down, plant, pluck up, were introduced to us back in chapter 1 verses 9 to 10. Then the Lord put out his hand and touched my mouth.

And the Lord said to me, behold I have put my words in your mouth. See I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant. In its present situation, this brackets chapters 36 to 45 with references to Beruk and his writing in the fourth year of Jehoiachin.

A number of scholars refer to the bracketed material as the Beruk scroll or document on this account. It also connects by catchwords to the preceding chapter in verses 27 and 30, they connect with verse 5, and to the chapter that follows which also mentions the fourth year of Jehoiachin. That year as we have seen was a year of critical importance for the region.

It was that year that Nebuchadnezzar came on the scene as the king of Babylon and defeated the Egyptians at Carchemish. As Beruk records the prophecies of Jeremiah in his scroll, we can imagine that he would have felt some sense of despair. His own life is entangled with that of his nation.

He seems to be doomed to be engulfed by its terrible fate. All the personal ambitions that he might have held will come to naught. Will his children or his family survive the

coming disaster? Will he leave anything behind? Or will he merely be scoured from the face of history like the doomed people of Jerusalem? When a nation is shattered, what becomes of the shards? We had another oracle given to a person in a similar situation in the case of Ibn Malik.

The Ethiopian eunuch who had protected and delivered Jeremiah had a personal oracle given to him in chapter 39 verses 15-18. The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah while he was shut up in the court of the God. Go and say to Ibn Malik, the Ethiopian, thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, Behold, I will fulfil my words against this city for harm and not for good, and they shall be accomplished before you on that day.

But I will deliver you on that day, declares the Lord, and you shall not be given into the hand of the men of whom you are afraid. For I will surely save you, and you shall not fall by the sword, but you shall have your life as a prize of war, because you have put your trust in me, declares the Lord. Beruk seems to have expressed his complaint to Jeremiah, who then reported it to the Lord, and the Lord sent him with a word to Beruk.

Like Jeremiah was, Beruk was troubled by the word that was delivered to the prophet. He feels keenly about the coming disaster upon the city, but also about his own place within it. The words of Beruk's lament are similar to the words of Psalm 6 verse 7, My eye wastes away because of grief, it grows weak because of all my foes.

In responding to Beruk, the Lord tells him once more that he is bringing this great upheaval upon the whole land. The whole land is going to be unsettled. In the midst of the disaster that is going to befall the nation, Beruk needs to leave his personal ambitions to one side.

He may have ambitions to rise to high status, as a member of the scribal caste, he might fancy that he could become an important figure within the regime. But the regime is going to be destroyed, and Jerusalem and Judah with it. Jerusalem and Judah are going to be totaled.

The coming disaster is a general one, coming upon all flesh. What the Lord will give him is similar to what he promises to Jeremiah and Ebed-Melech. While warriors might want to get great spoils from a victory, Beruk, like Jeremiah, is going to be part of a great defeat, and the only spoil that he can hope for is the spoil of his life.

Under the circumstances, that will be reward enough. A question to consider, in times of judgement and disaster, how can we learn from the Lord's words to Beruk in this chapter, how best to handle our personal ambitions? 2 Corinthians 12-14 I was crafty, you say, and got the better of you by deceit. Did I take advantage of you through any of those whom I sent to you? I urged Titus to go, and sent the brother with him.

Did Titus take advantage of you? Did we not act in the same spirit? Did we not take the

same steps? Have you been thinking all along that we have been defending ourselves to you? It is in the sight of God that we have been speaking in Christ, and all for your upbuilding, beloved. For I fear that perhaps when I come I may find you not as I wish, and that you may find me not as you wish, that perhaps there may be quarrelling, jealousy, anger, hostility, slander, gossip, conceit, and disorder. I fear that when I come again my God may humble me before you, and I may have to mourn over many of those who sinned earlier, and have not repented of the impurity, sexual immorality, and sensuality that they have practised.

This is the third time that I am coming to you. Every charge must be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. I warn those who sinned before, and all the others, and I warn them now, while absent, as I did when present on my second visit, that if I come again I will not spare them, since you seek proof that Christ is speaking in me.

He is not weak in dealing with you, but is powerful among you. He was crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God, for we also are weak in him. But in dealing with you we will live with him by the power of God.

Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realise this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you, unless indeed you fail to meet the test? I hope you will find out that we have not failed the test.

But we pray to God that you may not do wrong, not that we may appear to have met the test, but that you may do what is right, though we may seem to have failed. For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth. For we are glad when we are weak, and you are strong.

Your restoration is what we pray for. For this reason I write these things while I am away from you, that when I come I may not have to be severe in my use of the authority that the Lord has given me for building up, and not for tearing down. Finally, brothers, rejoice.

Aim for restoration. Comfort one another. Agree with one another.

Live in peace, and the God of love and peace will be with you. Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints greet you.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. In the second half of 2 Corinthians chapter 12, and the final chapter of the Epistle, Paul speaks of his third visit to Corinth again. His first visit was the one narrated in Acts chapter 18.

The second was the painful visit he wrote of earlier in this epistle. Continuing from his statement in verse 13 about his imagined wronging of the Corinthians in not taking support from them, not granting them the honour of being his patrons, Paul expresses

his determination to continue that policy of not taking support in his forthcoming visit. What Paul wants is not the Corinthians' resources, but the Corinthians themselves, their joyful response to his teaching and fellowship with them in the Gospel.

He is their father in the faith and it is not the task of offspring to store up support and inheritance for their parents, but vice versa. Paul is clearly not averse to asking for resources from the Corinthians, but not for himself. Rather, he requests them for the Jerusalem collection.

Paul's self-giving service of the Corinthians is entirely willing and not grudging. It proceeds from his love for them. Which is why the strange notion that the super-apostles have given the Corinthians that Paul loves them less because he doesn't take support from them is so bewildering to Paul.

As he has earlier expressed in this letter, Paul is dismayed by the fact that his love for the Corinthians is not truly requited. In fact, it seems as if a really shameful accusation has been made, a claim that the Jerusalem collection is a duplicitous ruse to take money from the Corinthians without doing so directly. Paul reminds the Corinthians of the fact that other associates of his were involved in organising the collection.

If Paul were defrauding them, these parties must presumably be in on the scheme. Yet Titus, for whom the Corinthians seem to have some genuine affection, and the other parties all behave themselves in the same scrupulously consistent and transparent fashion. At this point, Paul steps back from his argument.

He wishes to address a potential misconception. It might appear to some that his epistle is largely an attempt on Paul's part to defend himself, an epistle driven by his own personal interests. However, Paul's authority has never been an end in itself, as if Paul were chiefly concerned about some status that he personally enjoyed on account of it.

No, Paul's authority exists for the purpose of their protection and edification. These are the things that have concerned Paul throughout. Paul's worry is that when he comes to them, he may find that they have not set things in order, and that he will have another painful and tense visit, with lingering hostilities from some of the Corinthians towards him, and another visit in which he will have to cause the Corinthians grief by sharp rebuke.

It seems as if Paul has gotten wind of the fact that some of the issues that he addressed in Corinth in 1 Corinthians are still causing problems there, and that some of those who were originally causing the problems haven't repented. If matters of sexual immorality are still causing issues in Corinth, Paul's use of the illustration of a father jealously protecting his betrothed daughter from seduction at the beginning of chapter 11 might well have been a more apt one than we might have originally supposed. Preparing the Corinthians for his third visit, Paul refers to the ways that matters of contention must be

resolved, with the evidence provided by two or three witnesses.

There are various ways that the witnesses to which Paul refers might be understood. Some take them to refer to literal witnesses that Paul would summon when he deals with matters more formally upon his return to them. For others, the witnesses are the visits themselves.

Yet others see the witnesses as referring to the warnings that he has given to them, in person and by letter. Behind Paul's statement here we might hear Jesus' teaching in Matthew chapter 18 verses 15-17. If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone.

If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church.

And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. The logic of two or three witnesses may be at work in Matthew 18's instructions, not only in the accompanying parties in the second confrontation, but also in the two or three confrontations of the sinning brother taken together. The bringing of witnesses does suggest a more formal procedure that Paul is going to adopt.

Matters have escalated. Perhaps Timothy and Titus will speak in Paul's defence. Paul gives his warning that, when he comes, he won't spare the impenitent.

Like those condemned by Matthew 18, they will presumably be removed from fellowship. Some of the Corinthians have sought from Paul a demonstration or proof that Christ is speaking in him. They want to test the veracity of his claimed authority.

Paul treats this less as a questioning of himself, but as a questioning of Christ. Christ has been powerful among them, and the Corinthians should be well aware of this. Paul relates what he has been saying to the weakness and power connection to which he has often returned in the letter.

Christ's own identity was marked by this connection between weakness and power, and it is Christ who both must be determinative for the way that we think about power more generally, and must be the one in whom we situate ourselves. Those who think about power in earthly ways will find it difficult to understand the Christ-shaped ministry of Paul and his associates. The Corinthians have been looking for proof from Paul, but Paul turns things around on them.

The proof of Paul's ministry, as seen in chapter 3 verses 1 to 3, is the Corinthians themselves. Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, as some do, letters of recommendation to you, or from you? You yourselves are our letter of recommendation, written on our hearts to be known and read by all. And you show that

you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone, but on tablets of human hearts.

If the Corinthians are testing Paul, they should turn the spotlight around on themselves. The evidence of the authority of Christ at work in and through Paul is the Corinthians themselves. If they are looking for proof, then they should look at themselves.

The question that they must answer is, is Jesus Christ in you? Paul words the question in a way that presumes a positive answer. For all their faults and failings, Christ is indeed among them, whatever unsettling aspects of evidence that throw that judgement into temporary shadow. If Christ is indeed working among them, then there is evidence of Christ at work in and through Paul.

Once again, Paul's concern here is not self-justification and self-defence, but the building up of the Corinthians in the truth and in the path of righteousness. Paul is much less concerned with his own apostolic reputation than he is with the Corinthians' well-being, the health of his children in the faith. Paul is not spoiling for a fight with the Corinthians, or looking for an opportunity to flex his apostolic authority.

Rather, he is very glad to appear weak if they are strong in the faith. As a good father, he does not rejoice in bringing punishment and rebuke. He is entirely uninvested in proving himself tough when it is not in the service of building up his children.

It is for this reason that he is writing to them now in such a manner, to avoid a situation where he has to employ a more forceful authority with them. What he is praying for is their restoration. His authority was given for the sake of building up, not for tearing down, a point he has already made in chapter 10 verse 8. While there may be occasions when tearing down is required, this is not the ordinary intended use of his authority, so he will do whatever he can to avoid the unnecessary employment of it in such a fashion.

In Paul's final admonitions to the Corinthians, we might get a sense of those things that he deems most needful for them at this present juncture in time. He wants them to seek to restore things, their appropriate conduct and their relationship with him. He wants them to be comforted, something that will be achieved as restoration occurs.

They should put an end to conflict and dissension, and they should be at peace. God is the God of love and peace, and these are behaviours characteristic of his presence among us. As he often tells the recipients of his letters, Paul charges the Corinthians to greet one another with a holy kiss, as an expression of the holy unity and peace that we enjoy in Christ.

He conveys the greetings of other saints to them, which would serve to remind them of the fact that there is a wider body of people, of Christians, attending to the matters between Paul and them, and that for the sake of bringing glory to God through their

thanksgiving on the Corinthians' account, they should respond appropriately. Finally, Paul gives a three-fold Trinitarian blessing to the Corinthians. Each person of the Trinity is associated with a particular blessing - grace with the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, love with God the Father, and fellowship with the Holy Spirit.

We can best understand this with what some theologians have termed the doctrine of appropriation. God's works are indivisible. All of God does all that God does.

The Trinity isn't a division of labour. Nor is the grace of the Son a grace that is not at the same time a grace from the Father to us, or the grace communicated to us by the Spirit. The same can be said of the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

It is through the Son that the love of the Father is made manifest, and it is the Spirit by whom that love is poured out and personally present in our hearts. The fellowship of the Spirit is, according to 1 John 1.3, a fellowship that we enjoy with the Father and the Son. The doctrine of appropriation offers a fuller account of how each person of the Trinity can possess in a unique manner what is the common property of all.

According to this approach, for instance, by recognising the order of the Trinity, names, qualities or works can be especially attributed to one person, albeit not to the exclusion of the others. So while fellowship may be something wrought by all of the persons of the Trinity, it is most fittingly associated with the Spirit. A question to consider, how might taking Christ as our model for power change the way that we regard and exercise it?