

Seraiah

Jeremiah 51:59-64

51:59 The word which Jeremiah the prophet commanded **Seraiah** the son of Neriah, the son of Maaseiah, when he went with Zedekiah the king of Judah into Babylon in the fourth year of his reign. And this **Seraiah** was a quiet prince [*i.e. a quartermaster*].

51:60 So Jeremiah wrote in a book all the evil that should come upon Babylon, even all these words that are written against Babylon.

51:61 And Jeremiah said to **Seraiah**, When thou comest to Babylon, and shalt see, and shalt read all these words;

51:62 Then shalt thou say, O LORD, thou hast spoken against this place, to cut it off, that none shall remain in it, neither man nor beast, but that it shall be desolate for ever.

51:63 And it shall be, when thou hast made an end of reading this book, that thou shalt bind a stone to it, and cast it into the midst of Euphrates:

51:64 And thou shalt say, Thus shall Babylon sink, and shall not rise from the evil that I will bring upon her: and they shall be weary. Thus far are the words of Jeremiah.

Why is Seraiah little known?

The obvious reason is because he only appears in one Bible passage. Moreover he doesn't seem particularly heroic when compared to Jeremiah and Baruch.

Baruch—who also assisted Jeremiah by reading a scroll to others (36:5-10)—is mentioned far more than Seraiah. He was persecuted along with the prophet (36:26, 43:6), but nothing is said about Seraiah facing opposition. In fact, the message that Seraiah read—about the future destruction of Babylon—was undoubtedly popular with the Jews in captivity.

The main reason why the Seraiah passage is so brief is probably because most of God's extended message to the captives was written on the scroll that was thrown into the river but is not recorded in the Book of Jeremiah. Seraiah did not need to memorize many lines (51:64).

Even so, there are things to be learned from Seraiah, including through comparing him to Baruch who may have been his brother. *The names of their father(s) and their grandfather(s) are the same (32:12, 51:59).*

negatives

There is little or nothing negative written about Seraiah, though some might criticize him for working for King Zedekiah (51:59). They may ask, "How could he work for such a wicked king and still be God's messenger at the same time?" Well, apparently Jeremiah did not have a problem with that. So why should we? Zedekiah was a weak and unstable king who occasionally did that which was right. And let's not forget that Eben-Melech, who was also a good man, worked for Zedekiah as well. (See chapter 38.)

As usual in this series, it is easy to complain about the lack of information, and this is done in several lines below. Another way to be negative about Seraiah is to compare him with others who are mentioned more and appear to have done more for the Lord. This is done in line B-6. Baruch is much better known, but it is Seraiah who stands out at the end.

Jeremiah did not say to whom the scroll was to be read, but it was written in Hebrew. Would Gentiles have understood its message?

Mark the points below as correct (C), incorrect (X), or partly correct (▲).

A	() Seraiah is not seen much.
A-1	() He is only mentioned in Jer. 51:59-63.
A-2	() We do not know if he was a good man or not.
A-3	() He does not appear until near the end of Jeremiah.
A-4	() We don't know if Baruch was really his brother or not.
A-5	() His actual ministry in Babylon is not reported anywhere.
A-6	() We don't know if his ministry was well received or not.
B	() Seraiah did not do much.
B-1	() He just obeyed orders.
B-2	() His message was totally negative.
B-3	() His main work was for King Zedekiah.
B-4	() No Babylonians would have seen the scroll.
B-5	() He wasted a scroll by throwing it into the Euphrates.
B-6	() He didn't do as much as Baruch (32:13-14, 36:4-19, 27-32).

positives

Many people in the Bible are more important than their name counts indicate. Though they may only appear once or twice in the biblical record, they still are important when they do appear. Such is the case with Seraiah.

Jeremiah himself apparently could not go to Babylon for some reason. So he instead got someone who was already going, to take a scroll. Does this remind you of Paul and some of his couriers in the New Testament? Though there are some differences, it probably does.

Sometimes a small section or a few lines near the end of a book are as important as a longer section earlier in the same work. Perhaps that is the case with the Seraiah passage. (Apparently 51:59-64 are the last lines written by Jeremiah.)

It is important to make the message clear. And Seraiah, following Jeremiah's instructions, did so by throwing the scroll with a stone attached into the river. What a powerful object lesson that was! Of course, he also clearly explained how his action illustrated Babylon's end.

Mark the points below as correct (C), incorrect (X), or partly correct (▲).

C	() Seraiah was Jeremiah's coworker.
C-1	() Jeremiah needed and asked for Seraiah's assistance.
C-2	() Seraiah's work was climactic, near the end of the Book.
C-3	() His clear message was Jeremiah's message too.
C-4	() He was like Epaphroditus (Phil. 2:25-30, 4:18).
C-5	() Like Jeremiah, he spoke for the God of Israel.
C-6	() He was Jeremiah's main coworker.
D	() Seraiah (probably) did a good job.
D-1	() There is no reason to believe that he failed in his mission.
D-2	() We don't need to know any more about Seraiah's work.
D-3	() He was not a false prophet. (<i>He did not give false hope.</i>)
D-4	() The scroll was a transnational object lesson.
D-5	() He helped encourage the Jews in Babylon.
D-6	() He helped show that God is just.

conclusions

worksheet answers

There are four Incorrect Lines. First, Jeremiah would not have chosen Seraiah if he were an evil man (A-2). Second, it was not wasteful to cast the scroll into the Euphrates after reading it (B-5). That was an important part of the message. Third, there probably were some Babylonians who saw the scroll being thrown (B-4). And fourth, Seraiah was not Jeremiah’s main coworker (C-6). It was Baruch (Jer. 45:1-5).

Some other lines may be false as well. It is at least partly incorrect to say that Seraiah did not do much (B) and that his main work was for King Zedekiah (B-3). Taking the scroll to Babylon may have been more important than anything else he ever did. Though we do not know the reaction to his message (A-6), there is no reason to believe that the exiles rejected it (D-1).

One of the most important points made about Seraiah is that he helped show that God is just (D-6). This should have encouraged the Jews in Babylon greatly (D-5). *(The message against Edom might have done so as well. Compare Jeremiah 49:19-21 and 50:44-46.)*

So what?

It is important to know that God is just, especially in troubled times. So Seraiah’s ministry and message was very important at that time. The Jewish captives needed to know that judgment would come to those who had acted proudly against the Holy One of Israel (50:29-32). Likewise, the prophesy of judgment against another Babylon will be important to saints during the tribulation period. *(See Revelation chapters 17 and 18.)*

It is also important for us to appreciate the fact that God used a quartermaster—a secular worker who was in charge of procuring living quarters for others—rather than a prophet to deliver his message. Jeremiah was involved of course, but the message was actually delivered by an otherwise unknown worker. God delights in using ordinary people to accomplish his purposes.

Finally, notice the cooperation between Jeremiah and Seraiah, the quartermaster. The baton-like scroll was passed smoothly because God was in charge and there was no competition between the two. May it be so in our local churches today as well.

applications

Apply the points which you believe are most important or seem most needful.
