

Jehoiakim Burns Jeremiah's Scroll

36:1-32 and 45:1-5

DIG: Why might a written account accomplish more than nearly twenty years of preaching? Why do you think Jeremiah was banned from the Temple area (26:7-11)? Why do the officials of Baruch and Yirmeyahu hide? Was God very consoling to him? What great things might Baruch have wanted? What "great thing" does the LORD promise him? How has the family of Shaphan treated Jeremiah in the past? Why must they tell the king? What did Jehoiakim think of Jeremiah's scroll? How would you compare Jehoiakim's reaction with what King Josiah did upon rediscovering God's Word (2 Kings 22:11 to 23:3)? How must Jeremiah have felt when he heard about the fate of the scroll? Why? How did ADONAI address the arrogance of Jehoiakim (2 Kings 24:1-4)? What was the point of writing it down again (Exodus 34:1)?

REFLECT: Have you ever persisted in a task for years despite legal opposition and a total lack of visible success? What motivates a person to persist? Are you ambitious for great things, or satisfied with very little? How so? Why do you think officials sympathetic to Jeremiah did not stand up to the king? Have you ever looked the other way when something unjust or unethical was going on? How do people today show disdain for God's Word? Do you honor it? How so?

605-604 BC during the eleven-year reign of Jehoiakim

Some people may wonder: why was the light of God given in the form of language? How is it conceivable that the divine should be contained in such brittle vessels as consonants and vowels? This question betrays the sin of our age: to treat lightly the air that carries the light-waves of the spirit. What else in the world is as capable of bringing people together over the distances in space and in time? Of all the things on earth, words alone never die. They have so little matter and so much meaning . . . God took these Hebrew words and breathed into them His power (**Second Timothy 3:16**), and the words became a live wire charged with His Spirit. To this very day they are hyphens between heaven and earth. What other medium could have been employed to convey the divine? Pictures painted on the moon? Statues carved out of the mountains?

Abraham Heschel, *God in Search of Man*²⁰⁷

In the fifth year of Jehoiakim son of Josiah king of Judah, this word came to Jeremiah from the LORD, "Take a scroll and write on it all the words I have spoken to you concerning Isra'el, Judah and all the other nations from this time I began speaking to you in the reign of Josiah till now" (36:1-2). **Ancient books were written in the form of scrolls, parchment skins sewn together and attached to wooden rollers. The text was written in columns parallel to the rollers so that the scroll was unwound as the reading progressed.** There is no indication how long **the scroll** was. This expression is unusual and occurs only here, in **Psalm 40:8** and **Ezekiel 2:9**. The contents of **the scroll** are not known. There have been many attempts to reconstruct it, but all are mere speculation.

Perhaps when the people of Judah hear (Hebrew: *sh'ma*) about every disaster I plan to inflict on them, they will each turn (**shuwb**) from their wickedness and their sin (36:3). **God does not desire the destruction of the wicked but their repentance** (18:8 and 26:3). **The scroll** included words of warning of the potential disaster ahead, so that the people might have the opportunity to change **their** ways before it was too late.

So Yirmeyahu called Baruch son of Neriah, and while the prophet dictated all **the words** ADONAI had spoken to him, Baruch wrote them on the scroll (36:4). Baruch was the grandson of Mahseiah, first mentioned in 32:12-15, and his brother was Seraiah (51:59) who was **the staff officer** responsible for overnight stops on a journey for king Zedekiah, whose task was to secure suitable arrangements. Before coming into Jeremiah's life we know nothing about him. As a scribe, **he** must have had scribal training; there were surely schools sponsored by the court that trained scribes in the skills of writing and record keeping. **He** evidently had ready access to other scribes: at a later point in the story **he** seems, on **his** own initiative, to have entered the chamber of the scribe Gemariah (36:10), however, **he** had to be summoned into the presence of the princes of the court (36:14). Perhaps **he** and **Gemariah** had been colleagues. It does seem, however, that **Baruch** immediately committed **himself** to share **Jeremiah's** destiny.²⁰⁸ It was the beginning of a long association between the two. Eighteen years later on the eve of the fall of Zion, Yirmeyahu entrusted **Baruch** the title deed to the field **he** bought in Anathoth (see Ft - **Jeremiah Buys a Field**). **Baruch** finally went with **the prophet** to **Egypt** (43:6).

What is emphasized here is **the very words** of **God**, not the concepts or ideas of YHVH. This is the process of inspiration of Scripture. First, **the words** originated with **Ha'Shem**. Second, **He** would reveal **His words** to **the prophet** (Yirmeyahu in this case). Third, **the prophet** would speak to the scribe (some prophets wrote themselves). Fourth, the scribe recorded **Elohim's words** on the scroll. Timothy tells us that **all Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness** (First Timothy 3:16).

Then Jeremiah told Baruch, "Because of my preaching, I am restricted; I am not allowed to go to the LORD's Temple." Because Jeremiah could not directly convey his prophetic words, he at least wanted to make sure that they were communicated indirectly. So Jeremiah took on a scribe and told him, "You go to the house of the LORD on a day of fasting and read to the people from the scroll the words of ADONAI that you wrote as I dictated. The prophet continued: Read them to all the people of Judah who come in from their towns" (36:5-6). So Yirmeyahu dictated. Baruch wrote.

Perhaps they will bring their petition before the LORD and will each turn (shuwb) from their wicked ways, for the anger and wrath pronounced against this people by ADONAI is great." Baruch son of Neriah did everything Jeremiah the prophet told him to do and he read the words of ADONAI from the scroll at the LORD's Temple (36:7-8).

This is what Jeremiah the prophet told Baruch son of Neriah in the fifth year of Jehoiakim son of Josiah king of Judah (605-604 BC), after Baruch had written on a scroll the words of Jeremiah when he was dictating. Clearly Baruch was discouraged because of the content of the message. He felt that God had added sorrow to his pain. But YHVH had a word for Baruch also, a personal word, and it was word that picked up the four verbs of Jeremiah's call (see Aj - [The Call of Jeremiah](#)). "This is what the LORD, the God of Isra'el, says to you, Baruch, "You said: Woe to me! ADONAI has added anguish to my pain; I am worn out with groaning and find no rest."

Baruch was weighted down with anxiety about his own future. The LORD said to Yirmeyahu, "Say this to him, 'This is what ADONAI says: I will overthrow what I have built and uproot what I have planted, throughout the Land. God was about to undo His own work; what sorrow it was to Him! But justice demanded that it be done. Are you seeking great things for yourself? Don't do it! My own land (of Judah) will suffer destruction. Jeremiah's prophecies will be fulfilled! But don't be distraught, I will give you your life as a prize of war wherever you go.' I, the LORD, have spoken" (45:1-5 NLT)! In a time when God breaks down what He had built, it was unfitting that Baruch should seek personal greatness. Scripture does not record what form his aspirations took. It was as if ADONAI said to Baruch, "Have no great expectations. Be careful for small favors. In the swirl of persecution and the threat of war you can grab ahold of only one thing . . . your life. It is all you can expect. Do not despise the day of small things (Zechariah 4:10).

In the ninth month (corresponding roughly to December) of the fifth year of Jehoiakim son of Josiah king of Judah a time of fasting before ADONAI was proclaimed for all the people in Jerusalem and those who had come from the surrounding towns of Judah (36:9). About a year had ensued between the time that the scroll was written and when it was read in public. Baruch was commanded to read the scroll on a time of

fasting when he could speak to a sizeable audience composed of citizens of Jerusalem and people from the outlying towns of Judah who had come into the City. The people prayed to the LORD for deliverance from the terrible drought at the time (see below). Perhaps they would turn (**shuwb**) from their wicked ways. Repentance was fundamental if the people were to avert the judgment that ADONAI had threatened in His great anger and wrath.

From the room of Gemariah son of Shaphan the secretary, which was in the upper courtyard at the entrance of the New Gate of the Temple (26:10), Baruch read to all the people at the LORD's Temple the words of Jeremiah from the scroll (36:10). **This was the first reading that day.** This was not incidental or unimportant. The reading of the scroll here had an interesting parallel during the days of King Josiah. Just as the scribe Shaphan was the central figure in bringing the scroll of Deuteronomy to Josiah (see **Ai - Josiah Ruled For 31 Years from 640 to 609 BC**), Shaphan's son Gemariah is the central figure in bringing Jeremiah's scroll to King Jehoiakim. When Shaphan read the scroll to Josiah - the king tore his clothes. But when Jehoiakim heard Jeremiah's scroll, no clothes were torn. Instead, the scroll itself was torn and burned (36:22-23).

Gemariah himself did not hold high office, but was friendly toward Jeremiah. The room from which Baruch read was in the upper courtyard, so he was in a position overlooking the people gathered in the courtyard below and could be seen and heard by all.

When Micaiah son of Gemariah, the son of Shaphan, heard all the words of the LORD from the scroll he became a true listener. He had heard Yirmeyahu's words many times before; now he heard **God's word**. He didn't hesitate. He immediately ran to his father and told him what he had heard. His father, a member of the king's cabinet, was meeting at that very moment with four other government officials. Micaiah went down to the secretary's room in the royal palace, where all the officials were sitting: Elishama the scribe, Delaiah son of Shemaiah, Elnathan son of Akbor, Gemariah son of Shaphan, Zedekiah son of Hananiah and all the other officials (36:11-12). All those men had fathers who served Josiah and were faithful - all of whom were loyal to Jeremiah.

They responded to the youth's urgency and sent for Baruch to come to the cabinet meeting and read the scroll to them. After Micaiah told them everything he had heard Baruch read to the people from the scroll, all the officials sent Jehudi son of Nethaniah, the son of Shelemiah the son of Cush, to say to Baruch, "Bring the scroll from which you have read to the people and come." So Baruch son of Neriah went to them with the scroll in his hand. They said to him, "Sit down, please, and read it to us." **The invitation of Baruch to sit in the presence of the officials was an indication of a friendly disposition toward him.** **This was the second reading that day.** So Baruch read it to them (36:13-15).

The father was as impressed as his son had been. When they heard all these words, they looked at each other in fear and said to Baruch, "We must certainly report all these words to the king." The contents of the scroll were considered to be of such great importance that they felt obligated to let the king know. Then they asked Baruch, "Tell us, how did you come to write all this? Did Jeremiah dictate it?" "Yes," Baruch replied, "he dictated all these words to me, and I wrote them in ink on the scroll" (36:16-18).

They had heard the truth and were committed to it. They were also responsible men and knew that their lives and the life of the nation were on the brink of disaster. They knew their king had to be told . . . but they also knew their king all too well. They had witnessed his temper tantrums before. The king had already killed the prophet Uriah after extraditing him from Egypt (26:20-33). He wouldn't hesitate to murder another. Such dreadful things spoken in public during a crisis endangered the lives of both the man who wrote them and the man who delivered them.

Then the officials said to Baruch, "You and Jeremiah, go and hide. Don't let anyone know where you are." If the cabinet members didn't know where Jeremiah and Baruch hid, they would be safe because the prophet and his scribe couldn't be betrayed. Also, the cabinet members would not be implicated in the hiding. They had removed themselves from the unfolding drama and the king, alone, would be left to confront God's words.²⁰⁹

When they went to report to the king they left the scroll with Elishama for safety. It would be better to keep the scroll out of the king's hands. After they put the scroll in the room of Elishama the secretary, they went to the king in the courtyard and reported everything to him. The officials felt obligated to tell the king, not to get Jeremiah or Baruch in trouble, but because the validity of the words demanded attention. But Jehoiakim was not like his father Josiah. The king sent Jehudi to get the scroll (while he kept himself warm by the fire), and Jehudi brought it from the room of Elishama the secretary and read it in its entirety to the king and all the officials standing beside him (36:19-21). This was the third reading that day.

Now it was the king's turn to hear the scroll read. Neither Jeremiah or Baruch was there . . . only the scroll. The confrontation between Jehoiakim and the scroll is dramatic and tense. It was the ninth month and the king was sitting in his winter home, with a fire burning in the firepot in front of him. Winters are cold in Jerusalem because its about 3,000 feet above sea level. Whenever Jehudi had read three or four columns of the scroll, the king, sneering and contemptuous, cut (Hebrew: *qr'*) them off column by column with a scribe's knife and threw them into the firepot, until the entire scroll was burned in the fire (36:22-23). Jehoiakim gives no hint of listening to the reading, but

makes a great show of contempt for **God's word**. The king gives us a preview of ancient "document shredding." He continued his disdain until the scroll was gone.

One might ask, why **Jehoiakim** would want to burn the scroll at all? Why not simply arrest **Jeremiah**? According to **36:29**, the king asked: **Why did you write on it that the king of Babylon would certainly come and destroy this Land and wipe from it both man and beast?** Certainly the king must have been at odds with **Yirmeyahu** for years, since word of **Jeremiah's** prophecies would have surely reached his ears (see **Bz - Concerning Jehoiakim or Eliakim**). If the king had any suspicion that **Yirmeyahu** was a true prophet, by burning the scroll, he could help rid the Land of the effect of the prophet's words. On the other hand, if **Jehoiakim** suspected that **Jeremiah** was a false prophet, his words were nonsense and should not be allowed to survive.

The king and all his advisors that he surrounded himself with, joined in the joking and jeering. They thought it was hilarious. They heard all these words showed no fear, nor did not tear (Hebrew: *qr'*) their clothes as a token of grief and remorse. The king would cut the scroll with disdain, but would not cut his clothes in repentance. Even though the senior cabinet members, **Elnathan, Delaiah and Gemariah**, who had called the king's attention to the scroll begged him to take what he had heard seriously and not to burn the scroll - He would not listen to them. He would yield nothing of himself to the claim of the scroll.²¹⁰ The king refused to let it touch his life. To make matters worse, the king commanded **Jerahmeel**, a son of the king, **Seraiah** son of **Azriel** and **Shelemiah** son of **Abdeel** to arrest **Baruch** the scribe and **Jeremiah** the prophet. In the face of **Jehoiakim's** cynical and self-serving action, the **Ruach HaKodesh** adds an ironic note: **But the LORD had hidden them (36:24-26)**.

The king imagines that he has prevailed. He thinks the burning of the scroll finished what was for him only a minor episode. The scroll had been burned and no longer existed. There was only the king. The story continues, however, after **Jehoiakim** left the scene.

God's Word is indestructible. After the king burned the scroll containing the words that **Baruch** had written at **Jeremiah's** dictation, the word of **ADONAI** came to **Jeremiah**, saying: **Take another scroll and write on it all the words that were on the first scroll, which Jehoiakim king of Judah burned up (36:27-28)**. The prophet had all his material in his head. He simply tells **Baruch** to prepare another scroll, and into it he dictates not only the contents of the old scroll but much else besides (**36:32**). **Jehoiakim's** stubbornness didn't alter **ADONAI's** plan at all. Neither **Moses' anger** (see my commentary on **Exodus 6t - It is the Sound of Singing that I Hear**), nor **Jehoiakim's** disobedience could deter Him. **YHVH** is the **Scroll-Maker** and would continue to make scrolls.

However, the act of **burning the scroll** turned out to be much more significant than the **king** ever imagined. **He** would not go unpunished for trying to destroy **God's Word** (36:29-30a). Also tell Jehoiakim king of Judah, "This is what ADONAI says: You burned that scroll and said, 'Why did you write on it that the king of Babylon would certainly come and destroy this Land and wipe from it both man and beast?' Therefore, this is what ADONAI says about Jehoiakim king of Judah: He will have no one to sit on the throne of David" (see Dv - [The Curse of Jeconiah, Also Known as Jehoiachin or Coniah](#)).

The heat from the **scroll** wouldn't last long. Soon Jehoiakim would be a dead corpse, exposed to the **frost of the night**. His body will be thrown out and exposed to the **heat by day and frost by night** (36:30b).

I will punish him and his children and his attendants for their wickedness; I will bring on them and those living in Jerusalem and the people of Judah every disaster I pronounced against them, because they have not listened (36:31). The key word of commendation to Josiah was: you heard what I have spoken (Second Kings 22:19b), but his son Shaphan was told that Jehoiakim and his advisors would not listen. Josiah had heard the **word** of ADONAI and obeyed it, and the result was a surging new lease on life for the nation. His son Jehoiakim, however, ignored the **word** of God and the result was an abrupt fall into captivity for seventy years in Babylon.

Jehoiakim's response to the reading of the **scroll** betrayed his excessive anxiety. Ignoring Holy **God's word** of judgement is a terrible and foolish idea. When God calls for a change in life, it's best to listen and change. Jehoiakim was desperately trying to keep the truth of **Jeremiah's words** and the reality of **God's truth** at a distance. Jehoiakim knew he was hearing the **word** of God; but if the king gave any indication that he knew . . . he would be accountable to obey it. So he played a silly little game, casually cutting away at the **scroll**, and feeding the **fire** until it seemed to disappear.

The king with his scribe's knife is a picture of all who attempt to *use Scripture*, who attempt to bring it under control and reduce it to something manageable (like the Oral Law did in Yeshua's day, see my commentary on [The Life of Christ Ei - The Oral Law](#)). **God's word** cannot be *used*. It is ADONAI's **word** calling us to a personal response. The LORD's word speaks to us, and the only response is a reverent answering. **It** is always more than we are, always before us, always superior to us.

Wanting to maintain control over our lives, to keep the initiative in our own hands, we sometimes chop **the word** of **God** into little pieces so that we can control it and maybe even put it to practical use - like warming us on a cold winter's day! We sometimes reduce **Scripture** to something impersonal that we can use for our purposes or discard at our pleasure. We dismember it so that it is no longer a complete representation of **God's words** to us . . . to which we must respond.²¹¹

God's word can be **burned**, but **it** cannot be destroyed. **It** has been thrown into **the fire** many times, but no one has successfully suppressed **it**. **Jeremiah** and **Baruch** merely went back to work again, dictating and writing. But this time there was more: **So Yirmeyahu took another scroll and gave it to the scribe Baruch son of Neriah, and as Jeremiah dictated, Baruch wrote on it all the words of the scroll that Jehoiakim king of Judah had burned in the fire. And many similar words were added to them (36:32). Jehoiakim's resistance only evoked a larger, more comprehensive, and more demanding scroll. His actions didn't end the threat of the scroll as he had intended, but only magnified the problem for the king. Now there were copies more extensive than the first edition circulating through the shops and streets of Yerushalayim.**