

The Books of Jeremiah and Lamentations

Lesson 19: The Scroll Burned and Rewritten -- Jeremiah 36:1-32

Some words you can argue with. Some words you can ignore. But every now and then a word comes that you cannot live alongside, so you have to do something with it. You either bow to it or you try to destroy it. Jeremiah 36 is the story of a king who tried to destroy it, and of a word that would not stay destroyed. God tells Jeremiah to gather everything He has spoken over more than twenty years and put it on a scroll, "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." The whole point is mercy. God writes it all down so that people might repent and be forgiven.

Jeremiah, barred from the temple, dictates to his friend Baruch, who writes it all on a scroll and then reads it aloud in the temple on a fast day. The word travels. The officials hear it and grow afraid, "We must report all these words to the king." They tell Baruch and Jeremiah to hide. And then the scroll comes to King Jehoiakim, sitting in his winter house with a fire burning in the brazier before him. Picture the scene: the warm room, the king, the column of God's word being read aloud, three or four columns at a time.

And then comes one of the most chilling gestures in all the Bible. As each portion is read, the king takes a scribe's knife, cuts the column off the scroll, and tosses it into the fire, "until the entire scroll was consumed." He is not trembling. He is not weeping. The text says it plainly: "Yet neither the king nor any of his servants who heard all these words was afraid, nor did they tear their garments." A few brave men begged him not to burn it. He would not listen. He thought that by destroying the page, he could silence the Author.

He was wrong. "Take another scroll," God says, "and write on it all the former words." The fire could burn the parchment but not the word. And this time God adds to it; the rewritten scroll is fuller than the first, and it carries a personal word of judgment on the king who thought he could cut God down to size. You can burn the paper. You cannot burn the word of the Lord. It stands forever, and the only question is whether it will find us trembling and turning, or hard and unafraid.

Group Discussion: King Jehoiakim listened to God's word column by column and calmly cut and burned each piece, completely unafraid (36:23-24). What does it look like, in our own day and in our own hearts, to 'burn the scroll,' to find ways to dispose of God's word rather than submit to it?

Personal Reflection: When God's word was read, the officials trembled but the king felt nothing (36:16, 24). When the Scriptures confront you with something hard, which response is more natural for you, a tender, trembling heart or a calm, self-protecting hardness, and what is God showing you about that?

Read Jeremiah 36:1–32

Study Questions

1. Read 36:1–8. God tells Jeremiah to write all His words on a scroll, hoping the people “may turn from his evil way, and that I may forgive” (36:3). What does this reveal about why God speaks His word, even words of warning, and about His heart toward sinners?
2. Baruch faithfully wrote and then publicly read the dangerous words God gave (36:4–8). Where is God asking you to be a faithful ‘Baruch,’ carrying or speaking His word even when it is risky or unwelcome?
3. Read 36:11–19. When the officials heard the words, they “turned to one another in fear” and knew the king must be told. What does godly fear in the presence of God’s word look like, and why is it a healthy and right response?
4. The officials trembled at God’s word, yet still had to decide what to do with it (36:16–19). When the Scriptures stir conviction in you, what helps you move from being moved to actually obeying?
5. Read 36:20–26. As the scroll is read, King Jehoiakim cuts it column by column and burns it, and “neither the king nor any of his servants... was afraid.” What does this calm, deliberate destruction of God’s word reveal about the nature of a hardened heart?

6. Jehoiakim thought destroying the scroll would silence its message and protect him from it (36:23). What 'scrolls' are you tempted to cut and burn, the passages, convictions, or warnings you would rather not face, and why?
7. Read 36:27–28. God simply says, "Take another scroll and write on it all the former words." What does the indestructibility of God's word teach us about its authority and its endurance over every human attempt to silence it?
8. The king could burn the parchment but not the word that stands forever (36:28). How does the permanence and authority of Scripture give you confidence and rest in a world that constantly dismisses or edits God's truth?
9. Read 36:29–32. The rewritten scroll is restored with "many similar words... added," and carries judgment on Jehoiakim for despising it. What does this teach about the authority of God's word, the futility of opposing it, and how the same word now stands complete and fulfilled in Christ as the living and abiding word that judges and saves?
10. Look back over the whole chapter, the word written, read, burned, and rewritten. Name one specific way the Lord Jesus is calling you to receive His word with a trembling, obedient heart rather than a hardened, unafraid one.

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: Isaiah 40:8, “The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever”; Isaiah 66:2, where God looks to the one “who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word”; 2 Kings 22:11–13, where King Josiah tears his clothes when he hears the Book of the Law, the opposite of his son Jehoiakim; Matthew 24:35, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away”; 1 Peter 1:23–25, the word of God that “lives and abides forever” and that brings the new birth.

More studies available on ChurchOfChristBibleStudies.com