

### The Destruction of the Scroll

#### Jeremiah 36

**Jeremiah 36:1-19** – *“Now it came to pass in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, that this word came to Jeremiah from the Lord, saying: <sup>2</sup>“Take a scroll of a book and write on it all the words that I have spoken to you against Israel, against Judah, and against all the nations, from the day I spoke to you, from the days of Josiah even to this day. <sup>3</sup>It may be that the house of Judah will hear all the adversities which I purpose to bring upon them, that everyone may turn from his evil way, that I may forgive their iniquity and their sin.”*

*<sup>4</sup> Then Jeremiah called Baruch the son of Neriah; and Baruch wrote on a scroll of a book, at the instruction of Jeremiah, all the words of the Lord that He had spoken to him. <sup>5</sup> And Jeremiah commanded Baruch, saying, “I am confined, I cannot go into the house of the Lord. <sup>6</sup> You go, therefore, and read from the scroll which you have written at my instruction, the words of the Lord, in the hearing of the people in the Lord’s house on the day of fasting. And you shall also read them in the hearing of all Judah who come from their cities. <sup>7</sup> It may be that they will present their supplication before the Lord, and everyone will turn from his evil way. For great is the anger and the fury that the Lord has pronounced against this people.” <sup>8</sup> And Baruch the son of Neriah did according to all that Jeremiah the prophet commanded him, reading from the book the words of the Lord in the Lord’s house.*

*<sup>9</sup> Now it came to pass in the fifth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, in the ninth month, that they proclaimed a fast before the Lord to all the people in Jerusalem, and to all the people who came from the cities of Judah to Jerusalem. <sup>10</sup> Then Baruch read from the book the words of Jeremiah in the house of the Lord, in the chamber of Gemariah the son of Shaphan the scribe, in the upper court at the entry of the New Gate of the Lord’s house, in the hearing of all the people.*

*<sup>11</sup> When Michaiah the son of Gemariah, the son of Shaphan, heard all the words of the Lord from the book, <sup>12</sup> he then went down to the king’s house, into the scribe’s chamber; and there all the princes were sitting— Elishama the scribe, Delaiah the son of Shemaiah, Elnathan the son of Achbor, Gemariah the son of Shaphan, Zedekiah the son of Hananiah, and all the princes. <sup>13</sup> Then Michaiah declared to them all the words that he had heard when Baruch read the book in the hearing of the people. <sup>14</sup> Therefore all the princes sent Jehudi the son of Nethaniah, the son of Shelemiah, the son of Cushi, to Baruch, saying, “Take in your hand the scroll from which you have read in the hearing of the people, and come.” So Baruch the son of Neriah took the scroll in his hand and came to them. <sup>15</sup> And they said to him, “Sit down now, and read it in our hearing.” So Baruch read it in their hearing.*

*<sup>16</sup> Now it happened, when they had heard all the words, that they looked in fear from one to another, and said to Baruch, “We will surely tell the king of all these words.” <sup>17</sup> And they asked Baruch, saying, “Tell us now, how did you write all these words — at his instruction?”*

*<sup>18</sup> So Baruch answered them, “He proclaimed with his mouth all these words to me, and I wrote them with ink in the book.” <sup>19</sup> Then the princes said to Baruch, “Go and hide, you and Jeremiah; and let no one know where you are.”*

## Background Notes

Ancient documents were written on papyrus or on parchment. The document was then rolled up, tied with a cord, the cord sealed with a clay seal, and the name of the scribe or official was stamped into the wet clay. Archaeologists have excavated clay seals, called *bullae* (singular, *bullā*). A number of bullae dating to Jeremiah's time period have been discovered in the ruins of ancient Jerusalem. Three names recorded in Jeremiah 36 have been found on clay seals: Baruch, son of Neriah, Jeremiah's scribe (v4), Gemariah, son of Shaphan the scribe (v10), and Jerahmeel, the king's son, probably meaning he was part of the king's royal court (v26). These bullae can be seen in the Israel Museum today. Once again archaeology supports the accuracy of the biblical record!

The date for the events in chapter 36 was 605 BC, the fourth year of King Jehoiakim's reign (v1). 605 BC was an important year in Old Testament history. Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon defeated the Egyptian forces at the Battle of Carchemish. Also in 605 BC Nebuchadnezzar made his first move against Judah and deported the first wave of Jewish captives to Babylon. Daniel and others of the nobility were taken into captivity that year, and King Jehoiakim became a vassal of the king of Babylon.

At this time the Lord told Jeremiah to write up the prophecies God had given him on a scroll. He did so, and he then sent Baruch up to the Temple courts to read the prophecies in public, on a day that a fast before the Lord had been proclaimed - probably because of the continuing Babylonian threat. Jeremiah did not go himself because he was restricted from the Temple courts, probably because of his scathing public sermons.

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. God's ways go beyond human expectations.

**Jeremiah 36:20-26** - *"And they went to the king, into the court; but they stored the scroll in the chamber of Elishama the scribe, and told all the words in the hearing of the king. <sup>21</sup> So the king sent Jehudi to bring the scroll, and he took it from Elishama the scribe's chamber. And Jehudi read it in the hearing of the king and in the hearing of all the princes who stood beside the king. <sup>22</sup> Now the king was sitting in the winter house in the ninth month, with a fire burning on the hearth before him. <sup>23</sup> And it happened, when Jehudi had read three or four columns, that the king cut it with the scribe's knife and cast it into the fire that was on the hearth, until all the scroll was consumed in the fire. <sup>24</sup> Yet they were not afraid, nor did they tear their garments, the king nor any of his servants who heard all these words. <sup>25</sup> Elnathan, Delaiah, and Gemariah implored the king not to burn the scroll, but he would not listen to them. <sup>26</sup> And the king commanded Jerahmeel the king's son, Seraiah the son of Azriel, and Shelemiah the son of Abdeel, to seize Baruch the scribe and Jeremiah the prophet, but the Lord hid them."*

When Jeremiah finished the time-consuming work of writing up all the prophecies, he certainly hoped that the people would listen to the message, turn from their wicked ways and be saved from any further Babylonian invasions. No doubt those were his hopes and expectations. After all, the Lord had said, *“that everyone may turn from his evil way, that I may forgive their iniquity and their sin”* (v3).

Did the Lord know what the response of the king and the people would be? Of course He did! Ephesians 1:11 says that God *“works all things after the counsel of His will.”* “All things” means ***all things!*** But the fact that God knew what their reaction would be doesn’t mean that God caused Judah to reject Jeremiah’s message. It doesn’t mean that God caused King Jehoiakim to cut up Scripture and throw it into the fire. No. But in His sovereign ways, God *allowed* the king and the people to exercise their wills and reject His gracious offer.

The king and the people of Judah were responsible to make the right choice - but they did not. And yet God was working out His overall plans for Judah through this rejection: His plans for Judah’s discipline in captivity, and for their future return. Jeremiah was hoping that the nation would repent at that time, but his hopes were dashed.

God’s ways go far beyond our human expectations. We all need to constantly remember this truth. Many times we have great expectations. Maybe we expect that our church will grow, or our neighbors and colleagues will get saved, or other positive expectations. The Lord encourages us to have great expectations. Remember Jeremiah 33:3, *“Call upon Me and I will answer you and show you great and mighty things.”*

But when things don’t work out the way we hoped and expected, don’t lose heart – because God’s ways go beyond our human expectations! Remember those well-known verses, Isaiah 55:8-9: *“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,” says the Lord. “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.”* God’s ways go beyond our human expectations.

## **2. God’s ways go beyond human efficiency.**

**Jeremiah 36:27-32** - *“Now after the king had burned the scroll with the words that Baruch had written at the instruction of Jeremiah, the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah, saying: <sup>28</sup> “Take yet another scroll, and write on it all the former words that were in the first scroll that Jehoiakim the king of Judah has burned. <sup>29</sup> And you shall say to Jehoiakim king of Judah, ‘Thus says the Lord: “You have burned this scroll, saying, ‘Why have you written in it that the king of Babylon will certainly come and destroy this land, and cause man and beast to cease from here?’”*

*<sup>30</sup> Therefore thus says the Lord concerning Jehoiakim king of Judah: “He shall have no one to sit on the throne of David, and his dead body shall be cast out to the heat of the day and the frost of the night. <sup>31</sup> I will punish him, his family, and his servants for their iniquity; and I will bring on them, on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and on the men of Judah all the doom that I have pronounced against them; but they did not heed.”” <sup>32</sup> Then Jeremiah took another scroll and gave it to Baruch the scribe, the son of Neriah, who wrote on it at the instruction of Jeremiah all the words of the book that Jehoiakim king of Judah burned in the fire. And there were added to them many similar words.”*

After King Jehoiakim burned the scroll, the Lord told Jeremiah to write the prophecies all over again! If you were Jeremiah, how would you have felt at that point? “Lord, this took a lot of time and effort! Are you sure this was the most efficient way to get the book of Jeremiah written? Couldn’t King Jehoiakim have rejected the message without burning the scroll, so I wouldn’t have to write it all over again?” We know the answer here, don’t we? God’s ways go beyond human efficiency.

One result was that **more** of Jeremiah’s prophecies were added to the book of Jeremiah that we have today. God’s ways go beyond human efficiency! This is as true today as it was in Jeremiah’s day. We tend to think that the most **efficient** way of doing things is the best way – the fastest way, the simplest way, the most economical way. But that is not necessarily God’s way! God’s ways are beyond human efficiency.

We should try to be efficient in the use of our time, and talent, and money - but let’s not tie God’s hands with the ropes of human efficiency. The Lord may purposely want us to take more time with certain people, and expand more effort on certain projects, and spend more money for certain needs. He may even want us to do something all over again, even though it seems so inefficient. Remember, God’s ways go beyond our human efficiency!

## Practical Application

### Let’s not cut up the Scripture – let’s let Scripture cut us!

Hebrews 4:12 says, *“For the word of God is living and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.”*

Remember back in King Josiah’s day, when the Law of God was found in the rubbish of the Temple? When God’s Word was read to the king and the people, they **repented** of their sinful ways, and there was a great revival. They let the Scripture “cut” them, like a surgeon’s knife removes malignancy. Now, only 15-20 years later, King Jehoiakim heard the word of the Lord. But instead of letting the Scripture cut him, the king cut up God’s Word. He thought he had destroyed the Scripture and the voice of the Lord.

Unbelievers having been trying to destroy Scripture ever since - by “cutting out” pieces from the Word of God, and by questioning its accuracy and authority. What about us, as believers? Do we do the same thing? Do we prevent God’s Word from being effective by questioning its authority over our lives, or by picking and choosing what doctrines we want (or don’t want) to obey? Let’s not cut up the Scripture.

### Let’s let Scripture cut us!