

BIBLE STUDY HELPS

TITLE: Speaks (The Cost of Rejecting God's Message)

TEXT: Jeremiah 36:19-31

TARGET: SESSION IN A SENTENCE

We must understand the consequences for rejecting God's Message.

LOOK UP: FOCUSING THE GROUP

Introduce (Display your cell phone):

According to Pew Research, Eight-in-ten Americans say they don't generally answer their cellphone when an unknown number calls. (Source: <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2020/12/14/most-americans-dont-answer-cellphone-calls-from-unknown-numbers/>)

While we might understand this response to unknown callers, it seems that over the past few years, more and more people have begun to ignore calls and texts from even their closest friends.

Ask: How quickly do you respond when someone you know sends you a text? When your cell phone rings, do you answer it if you know who the caller is?

Most of us struggle with responding to calls and texts today. While we might not admit it, there are also times when God sends us a message that we choose to ignore as well. Imagine someone receiving a written message from God and tearing it to shreds and burning it? This is what took place in chapter 36 of Jeremiah. The king of Judah, King Jehoiakim, didn't like the message that came from God's prophet, Jeremiah. So, he tried to dispose of it. But God's Word could not be destroyed, and the truth it declared could not be avoided.

This event took place after the Babylonian siege that resulted in Jerusalem's destruction in 587 BC. This was when the first wave of exiles was sent to Babylon from the Southern Kingdom, Judah. In the fifth year of Judah's evil King Jehoiakim, the Lord instructed Jeremiah to record his prophetic words on a scroll. Jeremiah 36:2-3 describes the message and the reason God sends the message:

"Take a scroll, and write on it all the words I have spoken to you concerning Israel, Judah, and all the nations from the time I first spoke to you during Josiah's reign until today. ³ Perhaps when the house of Judah hears about all the disaster I am planning to bring on them, each one of them will turn from his evil way. Then I will forgive their iniquity and their sin." (Jeremiah 36:2-3)

Jeremiah faithfully dictated the words to Baruch, his scribe, who later shared the words with all those who came to the temple (Jeremiah 36:4-10).

An official named Micaiah heard the Lord's words and shared what he had heard with other leaders (Jeremiah 36:11-13). Baruch then read the scroll Jeremiah had dictated to these officials. After hearing what God had said through the prophet, the men determined that King Jehoiakim also needed to hear these messages (Jeremiah 36:14-18).

What we will observe in Jehoiakim's response to God's Word should cause us to stop and evaluate how we might respond to the messages God sends to us through His Word and His Spirit. We should also observe the consequences when a society refuses to hear and respond to God's Word.

Audio Option: The following audio version of Jeremiah 36 could be played as the group follows in their Bible before you guide the discussion. Or it could be used for you to learn how to pronounce the names in the passage prior to guiding the study: <https://live.bible.is/bible/ENGNTL/JER/36>

Let's first examine how the officials responded to the message.

LOOK IN: UNPACKING THE BIBLICAL TEXT

God's Message Prompts a Response – Jeremiah 36:16-21 (note expanded verses from ETB study guide)

¹⁶ When they had heard all the words, they turned to each other in fear and said to Baruch, "We must surely tell the king all these things." ¹⁷ Then they asked Baruch, "Tell us, how did you write all these words? At his dictation?" ¹⁸ Baruch said to them, "At his dictation. He recited all these words to me while I was writing on the scroll in ink." ¹⁹ The officials said to Baruch, "You and Jeremiah must hide and tell no one where you are." ²⁰ Then, after depositing the scroll in the chamber of Elishama the scribe, the officials came to the king at the courtyard and reported everything in the hearing of the king. ²¹ The king sent Jehudi to get the scroll, and he took it from the chamber of Elishama the scribe. Jehudi then read it in the hearing of the king and all the officials who were standing by the king.

Guide: How did the leaders respond to Baruch and the message from God that he delivered on behalf of Jeremiah? Why were they afraid when they heard the message? Why did they fear for Jeremiah and Baruch's life?

Verse 12 names five officials to whom Micaiah, the original recipient of Jeremiah's message (v. 11), brought the news. Try to imagine what unfolds:

- The officials heard the message and were afraid. Yet they felt the king needed to hear the message.
- The officials knew that the king would likely reject the message and come after Jeremiah and Baruch, so they encouraged them to hide.
- Instead of taking the scroll to King Jehoiakim, they left the scroll under the care of Elishama the scribe.
- Then other officials recounted for Jehoiakim the details and requested a meeting to discuss Jeremiah's message.
- *The king sent Jehudi to get the scroll.*
- Jehudi retrieved the scroll from Elishama (v. 20) and brought it to the king.
- Jehudi then read it in Jehoiakim's *hearing*, as the other officials stood by.

Discuss: Why was it vital for the king to hear the message? Why is Jehoiakim's response so important?

Jehoiakim's response was vital because royal support for Jeremiah's words could turn the country back toward the Lord. On the other hand, the king's rejection of Jeremiah's words would lead to God's judgment.

Believers are called to deliver God's Word faithfully. That can happen through preaching, teaching, or even a simple conversation. The nature of our delivery will vary, but God invites us to share in delivering His Word wherever and however we can.

Sadly, Jehoiakim responded even worse to the message than what was anticipated. Imagine standing before King Jehoiakim as he responds. Consider how you would feel.

God's Message is Blatantly and Callously Ignored – Jeremiah 36:22-26

²² *Since it was the ninth month, the king was sitting in his winter quarters with a fire burning in front of him.* ²³ *As soon as Jehudi would read three or four columns, Jehoiakim would cut the scroll with a scribe's knife and throw the columns into the fire in the hearth until the entire scroll was consumed by the fire in the hearth.* ²⁴ *As they heard all these words, the king and all his servants did not become terrified or tear their clothes.* ²⁵ *Even though Elnathan, Delaiah, and Gemariah had urged the king not to burn the scroll, he did not listen to them.* ²⁶ *Then the king commanded Jerahmeel the king's son, Seraiah son of Azriel, and Shelemiah son of Abdeel to seize the scribe Baruch and the prophet Jeremiah, but the Lord hid them.*

Discuss:

- Why you read what the king did to the scrolls what thoughts or feelings do you have regarding his actions?
- What would you have done if you were Jehudi and you observed the king's actions?
- How are people's responses to God's Word today like those of the king?
- What might be some reasons people disregard the message of the Bible? (In PSG, p. 91)

Jehoiakim responded with utter contempt for God's Word, and the actions he took to destroy the scroll indicate further disdain for God and the prophetic message. Additionally, we see how his view of God's message influenced the behavior of the entire audience in the room:

- His *servants* had no regard for God's message. They *heard* the message, but *they did not become terrified* at the king's actions, nor did they *tear their clothes*—an action that would demonstrate great distress or mourning.
- Jehoiakim *commanded* some of his officials' sons including his own son *to seize the scribe Baruch and the prophet Jeremiah*.

Discuss: Can you imagine the king of Judah sending his own son the sons of some of his officials to do the work of destroying God's messenger? What does the fact that the officials Jehoiakim commanded to seize Jeremiah and Baruch were sons, one being his own son, communicate about the influence our response to God has on the next generation?

People who reject God's Word will try to silence it. The Bible challenges people to admit they're sinners, and most people in this world just don't want to do that. Consequently, they invest a lot of time and energy into discrediting the Bible—or they persecute the messengers. Additionally, they usually desire to bring down the next generation with them by encouraging their own children to reject the message and messengers of God.

What one must never forget, however, is that there is a price to be paid for ignoring God's message.

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There are Consequences When We Ignore God's Message – Jeremiah 36:27-31

²⁷ After the king had burned the scroll and the words Baruch had written at Jeremiah's dictation, the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah: ²⁸ "Take another scroll, and once again write on it the original words that were on the original scroll that King Jehoiakim of Judah burned." ²⁹ "You are to proclaim concerning King Jehoiakim of Judah, 'This is what the Lord says: You have burned the scroll, asking, "Why have you written on it that the king of Babylon will certainly come and destroy this land and cause it to be without people or animals?"'" ³⁰ "Therefore, this is what the Lord says concerning King Jehoiakim of Judah: He will have no one to sit on David's throne, and his corpse will be thrown out to be exposed to the heat of day and the frost of night." ³¹ "I will punish him, his descendants, and his officers for their iniquity. I will bring on them, on the residents of Jerusalem, and on the people of Judah all the disaster, which I warned them about but they did not listen."

Discuss: Had you been Jeremiah, would you have felt like a failure or have possibly been unsure about writing another message for the king? What can we learn from the persistence of God to Jeremiah that he was to prepare the message "once again," plus some additional words to the king?

Remember Jeremiah's situation. He had prophesied for twenty years already and seen little spiritual response. Then, the king had sent God's messages up in flames. After Jehoiakim *burned the scroll*, Jeremiah and Baruch could have fallen into utter despair.

The "Therefore" in verse 30 introduced God's dramatic conclusion.

- Jehoiakim would *have no one to sit on David's throne*. Jehoiakim's royal line ceased shortly after his death. His son, Jehoiachin, inherited a city under Babylonian siege and reigned only three months before he surrendered to Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kings 24:8-12). Zedekiah, Jehoiakim's brother, became Judah's last king, and his rebellion led to Jerusalem's destruction (2 Kings 24:17-25:10).
- Jehoiakim's *corpse* would be *thrown out* without a proper burial, exposing it to *the heat of day and the frost of night*. The word *thrown out* is a different form of the word translated "throw" in verse 23. Jehoiakim had cast aside God's Word, so God would cast his *corpse* aside.
- Jehoiakim's officers would also be punished. Judah's leaders had failed miserably. The word *officers* likely denotes leaders who served the king.
- God's judgment would progress from the king to his descendants, to his officers, down to the residents of the capital, and finally to the general population. The Lord had repeatedly *warned them* about this *disaster* for twenty years through Jeremiah. Tragically, *they did not listen* to His words. While some of the people eventually returned from exile, the nation, in general, paid a terrible price for their sin.

LOOK OUT: LIVING OUT THE TARGET

One might think that we are past the days when those who reject God would blatantly destroy God's Word, but we must remember that we live in a sin-broken world. We might feel as if we are relatively protected today in our society for people becoming as angry as King Jehoiakim became. Is this because people are responding differently, or is it because the message of repentance and salvation is not being proclaimed? A July 14, 2023, CNN News Post reveals how people view God's written word in a "modern" society. It was reported that "Swedish authorities have approved a protest involving the burning of Torahs and Bibles outside the Israeli Embassy in Stockholm." (Source: <https://www.cnn.com/2023/07/14/europe/sweden-protest-israeli-embassy-intl/index.html>) Perhaps we aren't as immune to people responding negatively to God's message as we think.

Challenge—As we conclude this session consider the following:

- What can we learn from Jeremiah regarding sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ?
- How should believers respond to those who try to destroy God's Word? (In ETB, PSG, p. 98)
- Examine your own life to consider if you have "torn out pages in God's Word and tossed them in the fire" because you didn't like what God said to you.
- Consider whether or not your lifestyle reflects the actions of Jehoiakim. Are there things you are doing, saying, thinking, or not doing, saying, or thinking that communicate that you have "torn out pages in God's Word and burned them"?