

Jeremiah 36 • The Difference Between Hearing & Reading

Introduction

Sometimes it's truly shocking to be reading the Bible, come across a famous verse that you and practically everyone knows and recites by heart, and discover that within it's actual context of the verses and paragraphs around it, that it's actual meaning is quite different from how it's used. People "discuss" and "talk" about what they've "heard" concerning the verse, but that's quite a different situation from everyone actually opening their Bibles together and carefully pouring over the written Word in context. Intentionally or accidentally, a person can alter what they think they heard, but returning to the written Word removes all doubt as to its true meaning. The same was true in Jeremiah's day, people dismissing what he said as they changed what they heard to suit themselves. This all changed when he was commanded to write it down. People now had to make a decision as to what to do with God's Word.

¹In the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, this word came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, ²"Take a scroll and write on it all the words which I have spoken to you concerning Israel and concerning Judah, and concerning all the nations, from the day I first spoke to you, from the days of Josiah, even to this day. ³Perhaps the house of Judah will hear all the calamity which I plan to bring on them, in order that every man will turn from his evil way; then I will forgive their iniquity and their sin."

⁴Then Jeremiah called Baruch the son of Neriah, and Baruch wrote on a scroll at the dictation of Jeremiah all the words of the LORD which He had spoken to him.

⁵Jeremiah commanded Baruch, saying, "I am restricted; I cannot go into the house of the LORD. ⁶So you go and read from the scroll which you have written at my dictation the words of the LORD to the people in the LORD'S house on a fast day. And also you shall read them to all the people of Judah who come from their cities. ⁷Perhaps their supplication will come before the LORD, and everyone will turn from his evil way, for great is the anger and the wrath that the LORD has pronounced against this people."

⁸Baruch 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.

[Read v.1-3]

Observation: Up until now, Jeremiah's ministry has been oral. God now takes it to a new level by making it written as well.

Q: What is the historical setting being in which this took place in the 4th and 5th years of Jehoiakim's reign?

A: This corresponds with Nebuchadnezzar's siege which would soon result in the first of three deportations to Babylon, approximately 18 years before the final destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. Jeremiah has probably been prophesying for at least 23 years by this time.

Q: What is the purpose God desires for His Word to accomplish?

A: That upon hearing it, men would put it into practice so as to acknowledge and repent of their sins, returning to God sincerely from the heart. It's the New Testament equivalent to be a "doer" rather than just a "listener" of the Word.

*But prove yourselves **doers** of the word, and not merely **hearers** who delude themselves.*

James 1:22

[Read v.4-8]

Q: How do we know that these aren't merely Jeremiah's own, personal words instead of God's?

*All Scripture is **inspired by God** and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.*

2 Timothy 3:16-17

*for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but **men moved by the Holy Spirit** spoke from God.*

2 Peter 1:21

The word "inspired" can also be translated "God-breathed". Holy men spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. God did not by-pass their personalities and make them "zombies" – characteristics of their individual personality are included. But what they wrote of the Word of God is complete, authoritative, and final.

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Q: Why do you suppose the time to present the book of Jeremiah was to be a fast day?

A: Such occasions were the most likely to draw the maximum number of believers together in one place who are focused on the things of God through this and related activities centered on the temple. They should have been the most inclined to not just receiving God's Word, but acting on it appropriately.

Q: Is there a lesson for us in Jeremiah's use of Baruch?

A: We are to disciple and send others equipped in God's Word and not according to their talents or abilities. God's Word is the primary thing to be preached from generation to generation. It is our spiritual legacy.

[Read v.9-19]

⁹Now in the fifth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, in the ninth month, all the people in Jerusalem and all the people who came from the cities of Judah to Jerusalem proclaimed a fast before the LORD. ¹⁰Then 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, to all the people.

¹¹Now when Micaiah the son of Gemariah, the son of Shaphan, had heard all the words of the LORD from the book, ¹²he went down to the king's house, into the scribe's chamber. And behold, all the officials were sitting there—Elishama the scribe, and Delaiah the son of Shemaiah, and Elnathan the son of Achbor, and Gemariah the son of Shaphan, and Zedekiah the son of Hananiah, and all the other officials. ¹³Micaiah declared to them all the words that he had heard when Baruch read from the book to the people.

¹⁴Then all the officials 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 to the people and come." So Baruch the son of Neriah took the scroll in his hand and went to them.

¹⁵They said to him, "Sit down, please, and read it to us." So Baruch read it to them.

¹⁶When they had heard all the words, they turned in fear one to another and said to Baruch, "We will surely report all these words to the king." ¹⁷And they asked Baruch, saying, "Tell us, please, how did you write all these words? Was it at his dictation?"

¹⁸Then Baruch said to them, "He dictated all these words to me, and I

Q: Is this a fast that is part of one of the mandated observances in the OT Law?

A: No. The day and month indicate that this was a special event, most likely requested by the people and carried out with the approval of the king, but in which he did not participate. Because of the people's request for a special day apart from the other appointed days for fasting, conventional wisdom would surmise that these people were particularly ready to not just listen to God's Word, but do something about it.

Point: Jehoiakim was like many political leaders who go along with national religious observances, but in reality personally rejects God's Word.

Q: How would you characterize Baruch's ministry?

A: He preached the Word of God.

Q: Does it appear that God's Word had an effect on the people who had come together for the fast?

A: No. They only person we know of that reacted positively to God's Word was Micaiah.

Q: What was different about Micaiah's situation from the other officials? How is it that he was the first to respond?

A: Apparently he was the only one participating in the fast and present at the temple to hear Baruch. According to v.12, "he went down to the king's house" in order to find the others and relay what he'd just heard. Otherwise they would have never known.

Q: Along the same line, what is wrong with their reaction to hearing Micaiah's report?

A: Instead of going to the temple themselves and thus engaging in the acts of repentance that would have come from wanting to actually **do** something with God's Word, they send Jehudi to bring Baruch to **them**. They're interested and even alarmed, but not actually enough to sincerely respond as they should to God's Word.

Q: What is the specific thing that they all seem to be reacting to?

A: It's not merely "God's Word" being spoken – Jeremiah and Uriah and many other prophets have done that quite often before – but that God's Word was written down and being **READ**.

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wrote them with ink on the book.”

¹⁹Then the officials said to Baruch, “Go, hide yourself, you and Jeremiah, and do not let anyone know where you are.”

Q: It's nice that they want the king to hear the Word, but how is their personal response in v.16 actually inappropriate?

A: They fail to act personally on God's Word. Instead of being personally convicted to the point of taking personal action, they're actually going to wait for another's direction before they put it into practice themselves.

Point: One might make the argument that someone reciting God's Word orally could make changes to it over time as it is repeated, but it would have an unwavering permanence once written down. There could be no doubt that it was the same thing heard every time it was read aloud. It's also easier to misapply and misinterpret something one has heard, changing it in ensuing conversations so as to twist and dismiss it's original rendering; the written Word cannot be so easily ignored and changed as one repeatedly studies it. But in either case, it's useless if not applied personally.

Q: What is Baruch's point in v.18 that “He dictated...and I wrote them with ink”?

A: In the language of the day, it's a way of stating, “I added nothing but hand, pen, and ink.” It's Baruch's testimony of rightly handling God's Word, neither adding nor subtracting to it anything of his own.

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.

2 Timothy 2:15

Q: What might have justified the officials' concern for Baruch's and Jeremiah's personal safety? Why did they want them hidden?

A: We know from chapter 26 that the prophet Uriah was put to death by Jehoiakim for prophesying the same message as Jeremiah. They knew that Jehoiakim's personal inclination was to kill the messenger.

Q: So given Jehoiakim's record of killing a messenger of God's Word, why do you suppose his officials thought this was a different situation, that he might respond correctly this time?

A: Because God's Word was no longer strictly oral and carried by a messenger who could be killed, and the Word with it. Now God's Word was written and established apart from the messenger. It's ability to be copied and duplicated created the possibility that it could not be ignored or made to go away.

Point: The officials may have been good and well-intentioned men, but they were not righteous or godly men. They were not willing to take the necessary step of personally applying what they'd heard to their own lives, thinking it was enough to just pass it along.

²⁰So they went to the king in the court, but they had deposited the scroll in the chamber of Elishama the scribe, and they reported all the words to the king. ²¹Then the king sent Jehudi to get the scroll, and he took it out of the chamber of Elishama the scribe. And Jehudi read it to the king as well as to all the officials who stood beside the king. ²²Now the king was sitting in the winter house in the ninth month, with a fire burning in the brazier before him. ²³When Jehudi had read three or four columns, the king cut it with a scribe's knife and threw it into the fire that was in the brazier, until all the scroll was consumed in the fire that was in the brazier. ²⁴Yet the king and all his servants who heard all these words were not afraid, nor did they rend their garments. ²⁵Even though Elnathan and Delaiah and Gemariah pleaded with the king not to burn the scroll, he would not listen to them. ²⁶And 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.

[Read v.20-26]

Q: What do they do in v.20 that hints at their less than full commitment to God's Word?

A: They deposit the scroll in Elishama's chamber instead of taking it with them. They are literally putting God's Word on a shelf.

Q: Just as the official's physical positions indicate spiritual separation (they're in their chambers, not in the temple), how is this again seen with the king?

A: He should have been in the temple, fasting and praying, seeking to apply God's Word to his life. Instead, he is in his personal comfort zone, the Word brought to him on his own terms.

Q: What does the king's actions of cutting and burning the Word represent spiritually?

A: He did not want to change. God's Word convicts and exposes sinners, warning of the consequences of their actions. He couldn't kill the messenger as he'd done in the past, so he did his best to kill the message itself.

Q: According to v.24 they "heard all these words", yet how could this be since in v.23 it says he "threw it into the fire...until all the scroll was consumed"?

A: It would appear that as 3 or 4 columns of the scroll were read, the king would cut that part of the scroll off and throw it into the fire. So essentially it's a much longer process whereby he heard the whole Word read, lopping off 3 or 4 columns at a time and throwing it into the fire. It's quite a deeper hostility and wickedness than if he had just thrown it into the fire to begin with without hearing the whole thing.

Point: Slicing and dicing and even destroying God's Word is the essential actions of false teachers and false movements throughout history. Emperor Diocletian of Rome in 303 A.D. sought and burned copies of God's Word, as did many Popes, as were Bible publishers such as Tyndale burned at the stake for their efforts. Spiritual warfare always centers around God's Word. Just as Satan did with Eve, so he attempted with Christ in the wilderness, and so he continues with every succeeding generation of believer.

"Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away.

Matthew 24:35

²⁷Then the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah after the king had burned the scroll and the words which Baruch had written at the dictation of Jeremiah, saying, ²⁸"Take again another scroll and write on it all the former words that were on the first scroll which Jehoiakim the king of Judah burned. ²⁹And concerning Jehoiakim king of Judah you shall say, 'Thus says the LORD, "You have burned this scroll, saying, 'Why have you written on it that the king of Babylon will certainly come and destroy this land, and

[Read v.27-32]

Q: What is the irony of God's Word in relation to Jehoiakim?

A: He sought to destroy God's Word, but in the end it destroyed Him.

"So in the present case, I say to you, stay away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or action is of men, it will be overthrown; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them; or else you may even be found fighting against God."

Acts 5:38-39

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will make man and beast to cease from it?”³⁰ 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.”³¹ I will also punish him and his descendants and his servants for their iniquity, and I will bring on them and the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the men of Judah all the calamity that I have declared to them—but they did not listen.”³²

³²Then Jeremiah took another scroll and gave it to Baruch the son of Neriah, the scribe, and he wrote on it at the dictation of Jeremiah all the words of the book which Jehoiakim king of Judah had burned in the fire; and many similar words were added to them.

¹This is the message which Jeremiah the prophet spoke to Baruch the son of Neriah, when he had written down these words in a book at Jeremiah’s dictation, in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, saying: ²“Thus says the LORD the God of Israel to you, O Baruch: ³‘You said, “Ah, woe is me! For the LORD has added sorrow to my pain; I am weary with my groaning and have found no rest.”’

⁴“Thus you are to say to him, ‘Thus says the LORD, “Behold, what I have built I am about to tear down, and what I have planted I am about to uproot, that is, the whole land.”’ ⁵But you, are you seeking great things for yourself? Do not seek them; for behold, I am going to bring disaster on all flesh,’ declares the LORD, ‘but I will give your life to you as booty in all the places where you may go.’”

Q: What might seem familiar about God’s command to write down His Word a second time exactly as the first? When has this occurred before?

“At that time the LORD said to me, ‘Cut out for yourself two tablets of stone like the former ones, and come up to Me on the mountain, and make an ark of wood for yourself. I will write on the tablets the words that were on the former tablets which you shattered, and you shall put them in the ark.’

Deuteronomy 10:1-2

It’s the exact thing that happened after the original tablets were broken at the discovery of the Israelite’s having already broken them through disobedience.

Point: *What God writes the first time, He writes exactly the same again a second time; His Word does not change. The only thing that can possibly change in relation to His Word is our heart and mind and soul to accept and live it.*

“For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished.

Matthew 5:18

[Read Jeremiah 45]

Q: What accompanied God’s Word whereas Baruch was personally concerned?

A: The great burden of carrying it, even when few respond to it or even begin to persecute its bearer because of it.

Q: What do you suppose is being hinted at in God’s question in v.5, “are you seeking great things for yourself”?

A: It most likely refers to opportunities Baruch has to leave Jeremiah and perhaps the ministry in general. His skills would have been in much demand in his day and he was most likely offered opportunities to be well-compensated for them if he would only seek employment elsewhere. His life would get “easier” from an earthly point of view.

Q: How does God establish the reality of Baruch’s situation?

A: God points out that everything is about to undergo drastic change according to the very Word which Baruch would have to abandon. The best thing is to stay the course and remain committed to God’s Word. His life would actually **NOT** get “easier” from an earthly point of view.

Point: *Every single person in this story, whether they were “for” or “against” God or Jeremiah, had to make a personal decision as to what to do with God’s Word. It’s not a guarantee for this present life, but the one to come.*



Overall Application

- *How are you treating God's Word? Are you putting it on a shelf? Or cutting it to pieces like modern critics?*
- *Do you see the valuable difference between merely listening to sermons as opposed to regularly reading Scripture for yourself? Do you see how facing the truth of the written Word has the most potential for permanent change?*
- *To what degree might you be waiting for someone else to inspire, lead, or motivate you? Do you see that in the end it comes down to a personal commitment? How are you encouraging this in others?*