

## Rejecting the Book

Sermon preached by Pastor C. John Steer  
Autumn Ridge Church, Rochester, MN  
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No. 5: The Best of Books  
Scripture: Jeremiah 36

We are in the midst of a series on *The Best of Books*.

That was John Bunyan's description of the Bible.

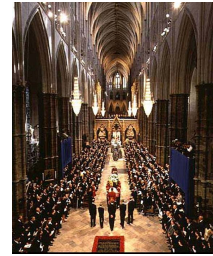
The reason we embarked on this theme is because 2011 is the 400<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the King James Bible which is recognized as the most successful translation in history.

There are many great stories about the King James.

So from time to time I am going to drop some of them into my messages. Here are a few for you.

The King James is still used at important formal occasions because it sounds more dignified than modern translations.

At the funeral service for Princess Diana in Westminster Abbey, Prime Minister Tony Blair read 1 Corinthians 13 from the King James Version.



Here in America the funeral service for Michael Jackson ended with a prayer in which Pastor Lucius Smith reminded mourners that, "The King of Pop must bow his knee to the King of kings. We pray that you would remind us Lord that our lives are but dust."

The formality of Pastor Smith's language comes from the King James Version.

There is a popular range of t-shirts sold on the Internet that proclaim, "Real men use a King James Version Bible."

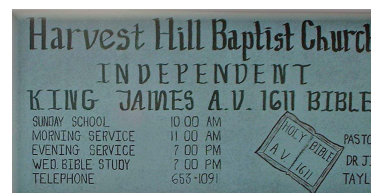
This sort of affection for the King James has led some people to make some extravagant claims for it.



In the 19<sup>th</sup> century in England there were a group of people who announced that the King James Version was inspired by God.

In the 1970s in America this led to the King James Only Movement.

Its supporters insisted that the King James must be used in worship and that all other versions are not only inferior but wrong. This in spite of the fact, that the King James



itself has gone through numerous revisions and thousands of changes have been made to it since 1611.

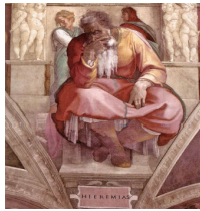
In our own community there are churches who use the King James not just as a matter of preference because it is a lovely translation but as an article of faith. They are often critical of churches who use other translations.

At Autumn Ridge we are grateful for all the wonderful Bibles that God has given his church. Especially as we know there was a time in human history when the Bible did not exist. In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve did not have a Bible.

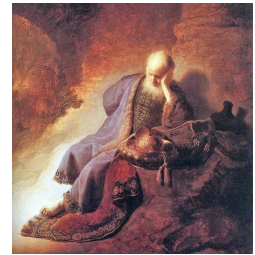
As God had given them everything they needed for a perfect life this must mean that a written Bible was not necessary at that time. Yet today God wants us to have his written word. So why and how did the written scriptures come into existence?

To find the answer please turn to Jeremiah chapter 36 in your Bible and take out your message outline as we look at the sobering subject of **REJECTING THE BOOK.**

Here in this passage we meet the Prophet Jeremiah. He lived during a time of profound moral decline in the nation of Judah. God told Jeremiah not to marry, or have children because the coming destruction of the nation would sweep away the next generation.



I am glad I don't have Jeremiah's job.  
If the people didn't like Jeremiah's sermon they put him in prison.  
It would be intimidating to know that if you didn't like this message I would spend the next week in jail.  
I would ask Dan Farm to do more of the preaching.



That is the situation Jeremiah lived with. So it is hardly surprising that he is usually depicted by artists like Michelangelo as rather depressed.

This chapter begins, **"In the fourth year of Jehoiakim** (that was 605 BC. Jeremiah had been preaching for 23 years at this point) **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 Israel, Judah and all the other nations from the time I began to speaking to you in the reign of Josiah till now."** (v 1-2)

Here we learn **THE REASON FOR THE SCROLL**

Until this point Jeremiah has just been preaching to the citizens of Judah. But now God decides that Jeremiah's sermon must be preserved on a scroll.

This is how the prophecy of Jeremiah came into existence.

Without these instructions from God our Bible would be a book short.

Notice God's expression, **"I have spoken to you." (v 2)**

This is what we call inspiration.

It is the miraculous working of the Holy Spirit through a human writer so that what was written was the divine word that God wanted recorded. Without making him a robot God guided Jeremiah in his choice of words.

This is what Peter means when he writes, **"No prophecy of scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."**  
**(2 Peter 1:20-21)**

God is showing Jeremiah the importance of the written word.  
God wants a permanent record of his dealings with his people.  
This is how the Bible came to be.

In Genesis God often spoke to his people.  
But in Exodus God says to Moses, "I need to write down these instructions" and so he gave Moses the two stone tablets with the Ten Commandments written on them.



It is the same with the gospels.

When Jesus left earth his apostles went around telling people about the Lord.

But as time went by the apostles realized they were going to die and there would be nobody to explain the gospel, so they wrote down their stories.

Or in Peter's case he told Mark who wrote them down.

The Apostle Paul did a similar thing. Initially Paul made a habit of visiting the congregations in places like Ephesus and Corinth.  
But then he realized this was inefficient.

He could communicate more effectively by writing letters to the churches and that is why we have the New Testament Epistles.

How glad we are that this happened.

We wouldn't have a Bible without it.

God wanted Jeremiah to make this written record for two particular reasons.

The first was **so that people may turn from wickedness.**

God explains, **"Perhaps when the people of Judah hear about every disaster I plan to inflict on them, each of them will turn from his wicked way." (v 3)**



This is why Adam and Eve didn't need a Bible in the Garden of Eden. Instead God came and walked and talked with them in the cool of the day.

But sin created a barrier between the first family and the Lord.

Adam and Eve were banished from Eden by an angel with a flaming sword and they could never return.

So the first purpose of the Bible is to encourage us to turn from wickedness.

The second reason that God wants Jeremiah to write a scroll is **so that people may experience forgiveness.**

God goes on to say, **"Then I will forgive their wickedness and their sin." (v 3)**  
 God longs for us to be restored to him.

This begins when we repent of the things we have done wrong.

It is then we receive a new start of divine cleansing.

The barrier between us and God is removed.

So now we can commune with God.

Many Christians have described meeting God in the scripture as walking with him in the cool of the day.

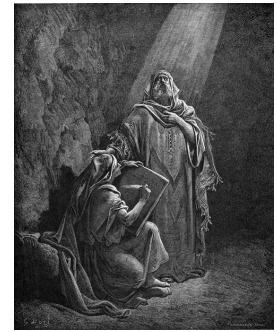
These are the reasons why God wanted Jeremiah to write a scroll. So the prophet called his secretary, a man called Baruch and he dictated all the words that God had given him.

The name Baruch means blessed.

He was Jeremiah's faithful friend.

He carefully wrote down everything Jeremiah told him.

It must have been a protracted job because Jeremiah is the longest book in the Bible.



The next event in the narrative is **THE READING OF THE SCROLL.**

It is quite likely that Jeremiah is in jail at this point.

He can't go to the temple but Baruch can.

**"Jeremiah told Baruch, 'I am restricted, I cannot go to the Lord's temple. So you go to the house of the Lord on a day of fasting and read to the people from the scroll the words of the Lord that you wrote as I dictated.**

**Read them to all the people of Judah who come in from the towns.**

**Perhaps they will bring their petition before the Lord, and each will turn from his wicked ways, for the anger and wrath pronounced against this people by the Lord are great." Baruch . . . did everything Jeremiah the prophet told him to do; at the Lord's temple he read the words of the Lord from the scroll." (v 5-8)**

There is tremendous value in the public reading of scripture.

It is interesting to reflect that in 1611 when the King James was published most people could not read without moving their lips. The King James was intended to be read out loud.

It is the only Bible that was created for that specific purpose.

It is why it sounds so majestic and why its cadences are almost poetic.

Paul tells Timothy, **"Devote yourself to the public reading of scripture."**  
**(1 Timothy 4:13)**

Sometimes as evangelicals we are guilty of talking a lot about the Bible but not letting the Bible speak for itself.

At our men's small group last Wednesday we began our study by reading 2 chapters of the Bible. We then discussed them.  
But the public reading of scripture came first.

Notice next **THE RECEPTION OF THE SCROLL.**

It made a big impression on one man in particular.

**"When Micaiah son of Gemariah, the son of Shaphan, heard all the words of the Lord from the scroll**

(That name Shaphan should ring a bell. Two weeks ago we saw how the high priest Shaphan found the scroll when it had been lost in the rubble in the temple. This Micaiah is his grandson)

**He went down to the secretary's room in the royal palace, where all the officials were sitting. . . after Micaiah told them everything he heard Baruch read to the people from the scroll, all the officials sent Jehudi . . . to say to Baruch, 'Bring the scroll from which you have read to the people and come.' So Baruch . . . went to them with the scroll in his hand. They said to him, 'Sit down, please, and read it to us.'" (v 11-15)**

The response of the hearers is interesting,

**"They looked at each other in fear." (v 16)**

Now what was the reason for this fear?

Doesn't God have words of comfort and encouragement for us? So why should they be afraid?

It is true that the scriptures are full of comfort but they also contain challenge.

Jehoiakim was a dreadful king.

His father Josiah had been a godly man but Jehoiakim had let the country go to the dogs.

People were not honoring God.

They listened to false prophets who told them what they wanted to hear. They followed other gods, even sacrificing their children to pagan deities.

God cannot allow people to ruin his world and defame his name.

He warned them that the Babylonians would come and capture them and take them into a foreign country unless they repented.

Throughout his preaching Jeremiah had emphasized the goodness and greatness of God.

He had explained that Yahweh is the Creator of all that exists, that he is all powerful and everywhere present.

He is the Lord not only of Judah but also the nations.

God wanted to bless Judah but if they turned their back upon him he would undo all that he had done for them since the day he brought out of Egypt.

He would bring judgment crashing down upon them.

The officials who heard the words of the scroll did two things.

First they told Baruch and Jeremiah to go and hide and second they reported everything to the king.

**“The king sent Jehudi to get the scroll, and Jehudi brought it from the room of Elishama the secretary and read it to the king.” (v 21)**

This is the highpoint in the chapter. Indeed it is the key moment of the entire book. The prophecy of Jeremiah has just been written. The most powerful man in the country holds it in his hands.

What is the king going to do?

Would he lead a movement for national repentance?

The answer, sadly, is no.

Instead we witness **THE REJECTION OF THE SCROLL.**

This was winter time and the king was sitting in front of a fire listening to the scroll of Jeremiah.

**“Whenever Jehudi had read three or four columns of the scroll, the king cut them off with a scribe’s knife and threw them into the firepot, until the entire scroll was burned in the fire. The king and all his attendants who heard all these words showed no fear,**



That statement is significant.

These men had lost the fear of God.

When an individual loses the fear of God they are on their way to destruction. The fear of God is based upon the sovereign power which he exercises in life.

It is the fear of the Lord that is the beginning of wisdom.

Wisdom understands that there is inevitable consequence to doing wrong.

**...nor did they tear their clothes. Even though Elnathan, Delaiah and Gemariah urged the king not to burn the scroll, he would not listen to them.” (v 23-25)**

The tragedy of this story is that the king is not convicted by God’s word. He is simply irritated by it.

Every time the king heard a statement he didn’t like he took out his pocketknife and cut that section off from the scroll and dropped the piece of the parchment in the fire.

He gave instructions that Jeremiah and Baruch should be arrested and they would have been except the Lord had hidden them.

Have you been like that king? I know I have.

It is so easy when we come across a convicting passage of God’s word to ignore it or say it doesn’t apply to us or to claim that it is simply wrong.

Perhaps God is calling us into ministry and we just don’t want to hear it. Maybe he is urging us to trust him, but we don’t want to.

So we reject his word. We cut it. We burn it.

Last Wednesday I was chaplain for the day at the Minnesota Senate. I had the privilege of opening the day's session in prayer. I prayed that the Senators would have the courage to act righteously.

That is not easy for politicians.

It is not easy for pastors. It is not easy for anyone.

But it is right and it is rewarding when we receive rather than reject God's word.

The king thought he had got rid of this pesky prophet but he hadn't for at the end of the chapter we read about **THE RESTORATION OF THE SCROLL.**

**"The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah: 'Take another scroll and write on it all the words that were on the first scroll, which Jehoiakim, king of Judah burned up.' (v 27-28)**

That is exactly what Jeremiah did. He restored the scroll and we are told, **"Many similar words were added to them." (v 32)**

Any king who thinks he can silence God with a knife and a fire has a very high opinion of himself and a very low opinion of God. The Lord simply told Jeremiah to write another scroll to which he added more material including this judgment on King Jehoiakim.

**"This is what the Lord says about Jehoiakim, king of Judah: He will have no one to sit on the throne of David; his body will be thrown out and exposed to the heat by day and the frost by night. 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." (v 30-31)**

The king had tried to destroy the word but the word destroyed him. King Jehoiakim and his officials would be punished for the disrespect they showed to the divine word of God.

The king would have no dynasty nor would he have the burial of a king. Had the king and his court obeyed God's word they would have saved their nation.

But they preferred to go their own way and ignore God's voice.

Over the centuries God's enemies have tried to destroy his word but they have always failed.

They forget what Jesus said about the scriptures, **"Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away." (Matthew 24:35)**

They forgot Isaiah's assurance that **"The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever." (Isaiah 40:8)**

In the days of the cultural revolution in China Bibles were banned.

If a Bible escaped destruction it was incredibly precious.

The binding of the book was removed and the individual pages were handed out to members of the underground church.

You might have Numbers chapter 26 as your portion.

That is a list of all the clans of Israel.

People would copy each other's pages by hand. Christian radio stations in the west would read scripture slowly so that it could be copied down. Despite the best efforts of the communists the church survived and flourished. Man cannot silence the scriptures.

Today the Bible is the most circulated book in the history of the world. It has been this way since the invention of the Gutenberg Press in the 1450s when the Latin Bible was the first large book to be printed by moveable type.

Every year since then more copies of the Bible have been printed than any other book.

In a typical year over 60 million complete Bibles, over 90 million New Testaments and over 1 ½ billion scripture sections are published in over two thousand languages.

We are blessed to have the word of God, including this prophecy of Jeremiah. The Bible speaks to us as individuals and as a nation. It has truths to tell us in times of crisis such as we see going on in Egypt. It urges us to turn from wickedness so that we may experience forgiveness. It speaks of a Lord who wants to bless us, but who will not be mocked. If we resist him, he will resist us and we are no match for his strength.