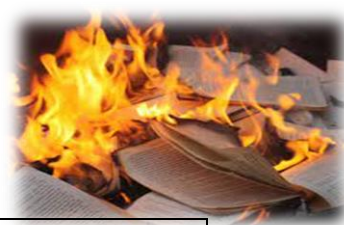


The Burning Scroll (Jeremiah 36 & 45)



A. Timeline

Years	Key Events	References
627	Jeremiah called into ministry	Jer 1:2
622	The book of the law discovered in the temple	2 Chr 34:8
609	Josiah killed in the Battle in Megiddo Jehoahaz reigns for 3 months Jehoiakim became king of Judah by Necho	2 Chr 35:20ff 2 Chr 36:1-3 2 Chr 36:4
605	Nebuchadnezzar defeats Egyptians/Assyrians at Carchemish First deportation to Babylon including Daniel.	Jer 46:2 Dan 1
604	Jehoiakim burns Jeremiah's scroll	Jer 36
601	Jehoiakim rebels against Babylon – Rechabite's faithfulness	2 Kgs 24:1; Jer 35
598	Jehoiakim deposed and dies / Jehoiachin reigns for 3 months	2 Chr 36:5ff
588	Jerusalem besieged for Zedekiah's treachery	Jer 52:3-4

B. The Burning Scroll (Jer 36)

- We are again going back in time to the 4th year of Jehoiakim's reign (605 BC). C.f. Jer 35 - the Rechabite story was ~601 BC after Jehoiakim decided to rebel against the Babylonians. The battle of Carchemish just took place in the same year (605BC, C.f. Ezek 30) which decidedly shifted the power structure of M.E. from the West (Egypt/Assyria) to the East (Babylon).

(a) The Lord instructed Jeremiah to write on a scroll the entire prophetic word he had spoken to Israel, Judah, and all the nations from the day of Josiah until now (36:2). It was a collection of the past 22 years of Jeremiah's prophecy from 627-605 BC (C.f. Jer. 1-25; Jer. 46-21?). This was God's last warning to Judah for each individual to respond to Him in repentance so that they could be saved (36:3).

(b) What was God's intention behind this? So far 22 years of Jeremiah's prophetic ministry has largely fallen on deaf ears in Judah. His messages were delivered in various places at various times in small fragments. If God were to collect all the words of the prophecy in one place and present them in a written form in its entirety, will they take heed and turn to God?

(c) The spoken word of God is powerful and has personality and feelings, however, it is quickly lost and often understood only in little fractions. (Most people retain only 2-3% of the preached message, but that's okay so long as you hear and apply what you receive. However, the written word can go where the messenger cannot go and outlive the messenger.)
- Jeremiah immediately called on Baruch the son of Neriah (C.f. 32:13 – local solicitor's clerk?) to write out the entire collection of his prophecy (36:4). How long did it take to write them out on a scroll? The project took ~1 year to complete.

(a) At the time Jeremiah was 'confined' – Heb. מִצָּר 'atsar': 'restrained/retained', so Jeremiah asked Baruch to take the scroll and read it out at the 'New Gate of the temple' on the 'day of fasting' (34:5). What does it mean that Jeremiah was 'confined' in those days? During the early days of Jehoiakim's reign, Jeremiah was put into stocks by Pashhur (Jer 20). He might have been 'bedridden' after the torture.

(b) This 'special fasting day' in the middle of winter was triggered by Nebuchadnezzar's campaign against Ashkelon (604BC). (The Day of Atonement – Israel's annual day of fast - falls on the 7th month Tishrei). It looks like the people of the city proclaimed the day of fast in sheer desperation (36:9).

(c) The New Gate in the temple is where Jeremiah often prophesied and almost got killed during the early days of Jehoiakim's reign (26:1). The people said, *'This man deserves to die! For he has prophesied against this city...'* (26:10). Jeremiah narrowly escaped death only because Ahikam the son of Shaphan intervened for Jeremiah. (Shaphan read the law of God to the people during Josiah's reign when the scroll was discovered. c.f. 2 Kings 22:3-23:3). The New Gate is also near the Outer Court where later Jesus prophesied and cleansed the temple.

(d) What would you do if you were in Baruch's shoes? After copying down Jeremiah's prophecies word for word on a scroll, would you go to the place where Jeremiah was tortured and almost got himself killed, and there risk your life by reading the entire scroll of Jeremiah's prophecies on his behalf to the people on the day of the fasting in winter? What did Baruch think about all these things? (C.f. Jer 45) Baruch, the blessed man, took the scroll he penned and read out the entire prophecies of Jeremiah at the New Gate of the temple (36:10).

3. When Michaiah the son of Gemariah, the son of Shaphan heard the words of the prophecy, he was alarmed. He went down to the king's house and told the princes (parliamentarians) what he'd just heard from Baruch's lips. The five princes (parliamentarians) are mentioned by name because they were sympathetic to Jeremiah's words. Among them was 'Elnathan', son of 'Achbor'. (Achbor was at the reading of the law in Josiah's days (2 Kings 22:12). Elnathan must have heard of Josiah's famous reform from his father.) Immediately, they sent Jehudi to summon Baruch to come and read the entire scroll in their hearing. When they heard the written words (22 years of Jeremiah's prophecy in one seating), fear came upon them (36:16). It was just like the days of Josiah 17 years before when they had rediscovered the law of God.

Will it trigger wholehearted repentance and start the second reform under Jehoiakim like in the days of Josiah? They knew they had to present this scroll to Jehoiakim. But first, they told Baruch to take Jeremiah and hide him somewhere safe and never tell a soul about it. Jehoiakim had a history of killing prophets who spoke judgments of God. (Elnathan the son of Achbor, was the man who extradited prophet Urijah from Egypt and Jehoiakim killed him. C.f. Jer. 26:20-23). They were *'once bitten, twice shy.'*

4. Now Jehoiakim was sitting at a fireplace in his winter house to keep himself warm (36:22) in Dec 605BC. After just hearing 3-4 columns of the scroll (equivalent to 3-4 pages), Jehoiakim took the scroll from the narrator and he tore it up with a penknife and threw the pieces into the fireplace, and burned them. Jehoiakim's response to the word of the Lord stands in stark contrast to that of his father, Josiah. Josiah 'tore his clothes up' in repentance when he heard the scroll of the law, and fell on his face in the fear of God (2 Kings 22:11-20), but Jehoiakim tore up the scroll and wanted to arrest the messengers.

The key sentence here is *'The king and the princes did not fear the words of the Lord.'* (36:24-25) This cemented their fate (C.f. Is 66:2). After destroying the scroll, Jehoiakim immediately went after the messengers to destroy them. Elnathan made the right call and the 'Lord hid them from the king.' According to Jewish tradition, there is *'Grotto of Jeremiah'* just outside the Damascus Gate near Golgotha.

5. Now the Lord commanded Jeremiah to make another copy of the scroll (36:27-28), a new and 'expanded edition' (2nd edition) which is what we have today. How was it expanded? The new edition contains the words of judgment against Jehoiakim. Jehoiakim will have no son to sit on the throne after him (36:30-31). Because Jehoiakim 'cast' (36:23) the scroll into the fire, God will 'cast' out Jehoiakim's body onto the streets without a burial (36:30). All of Jeremiah's words came true. Six years later the Babylonians killed Jehoiakim without burial, and Jehoiachin - Jehoiakim's son barely lasted 3 months on the throne, and that without proper inauguration.

C. God's Word to Baruch (Jer 45)

1. Chronologically this chapter belongs after Jer 36. The question was asked earlier, 'What would you do if you were in Baruch's shoes?' What did Baruch think about all this? *'You said, Woe is me now! For the LORD has added grief to my sorrow. I fainted in my sighing and I find no rest.'* (45:3). The Lord gave a personal word to Baruch after he obeyed the Lord (not without complaint and fear). The Lord said to Baruch, *'Behold, what I have built I will break down, and what I have planted I will pluck up, that is, this*

whole land. And do you seek great things for yourself? Do not seek them; for behold, I will bring adversity on all flesh. But I will give your life to you as a prize in all places, wherever you go.’ (Jer 4:4-5)

2. God said two things to Baruch about his affliction and his ambition. God had to deal with both.

(a) Affliction: two-fold afflictions – He had to write down and bear the weight of Jeremiah’s entire prophecy in one go. We found Jer 1-25 heavy going though it was spread over 6 months. When we write down God’s word, it lodges deeply into us. Baruch had to write out Jeremiah’s prophecies all over again after his first copy was burned up by Jehoiakim. When your hard work of great effort gets burned up in a moment, and you have to do it again, it is very discouraging. But thank God he obeyed, or we would not have the book of Jeremiah today! But at the time Baruch said, ‘Lord, I cannot take it anymore. Why do you have to add more sorrow to my pain? I am fed up with this endless transcribing business.’ However, God knew that behind his complaint there was a deeper issue, ‘hidden ambition.’

(b) Ambition – Baruch was a young man with high hopes in life. Baruch’s grandfather had been the governor of Jerusalem during Josiah’s reign (c.f. 32:12; 2 Chr 34:8), and Baruch’s brother was a high official (quartermaster) under King Zedekiah (51:59). Clearly, Baruch was an educated man who may have entertained hopes of attaining a high position in the nation. However, Baruch’s association with Jeremiah meant his ambition will never be realised as his brother’s would be. If Baruch even survived, he would at best finish up as Jeremiah’s secretary and play the second fiddle for life.

3. What was God saying to Baruch?

(a) Affliction: *‘Baruch, I know how you feel about having to write the scroll all over again. I built this city with a great love for My people so they can live there forever. But now I have to destroy this city, and I will have to rebuild it all over again. I know how you feel. Now can you feel what I feel toward this city?’*

(b) Ambition: *‘Baruch, do you wish you were called for greater things, higher positions, and more spectacular ministry? Seek not the great things for yourself. Be grateful that you are alive at all because I will give you as a reward ‘your life’ wherever you go because you have been faithful to Me. I do not promise you a high position in this life. But I promise you the life which is My reward always.’* When the Babylonians invaded Judah, they mysteriously freed just two people – Jeremiah and Baruch. They were taken to Egypt where they had a peaceful end.

D. Application

1. We are all ‘Baruchs’ with the 66 scrolls of the Word of God already given to us. Our job is not to reinvent the wheel, but to write it down (etch it) into our hearts. Just as God has sent the apostles, God is sending us in their place to take the word of God and present it to the world. Without changing or altering anything – the ‘entire counsel of God.’ There will be ‘Josiahs’ who will repent and be saved. There will be ‘Jehoiakims’ who will rebel and be condemned. Are we willing to go and bear the written word of God, and make it into the ‘spoken’ and ‘lived-out’ word as the apostles did? Will we be faithful?
2. There is both cost and blessing to being God’s messengers. ‘Baruch’ means ‘blessed.’ God had to deal with Baruch regarding ‘affliction’ and ‘ambition’. This is the cost of obedience. Will we endure the affliction of walking with Jesus? Will we surrender our ambition and serve the Lord in the way He has called and anointed us – even if it means playing the second fiddle? The Lord’s reward for our faithfulness to Him is always the ‘life itself’, the everlasting life of God in Christ Jesus. Amen.