

The king cannot silence God's word

Jeremiah 36:1–8, 20–32 · Junior primary · Lesson 4

The LORD's true word cannot be cancelled by rejecting it, so we should hear His warning and turn to Him for mercy.

Estimated reading time: 15 minutes

Read Jeremiah 36 as a whole, giving particular attention to verses 1–8 and 20–32. A scroll passes from a prophet's dictation to a scribe's hands, from a public reading to a gathering of officials, and finally into the king's room. With each reading, the same question becomes more urgent: how will the hearers respond to what God has said?

Before concentrating on the fire, notice the purpose stated near the beginning. God has Jeremiah's warnings written so that the people may hear, turn from evil and receive forgiveness. The scroll carries a serious warning within a gracious invitation. If we begin only with the king's anger, we may miss the mercy he is refusing.

Read Jeremiah 25:1–14 for the wider setting and 2 Kings 22:8–20 for a helpful earlier contrast. Jehoiakim's father Josiah had heard the book of the law with a very different response. Then read Jeremiah 31:31–34 alongside Luke 22:19–20. These passages will help you connect the need exposed here with God's promise of forgiveness and the new covenant established through Jesus.

As you reread, distinguish three things: the physical scroll, the human messengers and the LORD's word. The king can destroy the first and threaten the second. Can he change the truth or authority of the third? That question gives the lesson its movement.

Jeremiah served in Judah during the years leading towards the kingdom's fall to Babylon. Judah was the southern kingdom, with Jerusalem as its capital. The temple was there, but having the temple in their city did not make the people's idolatry and injustice harmless. Jeremiah repeatedly called them to turn back to the LORD.

The opening of chapter 36 places the instruction to write in Jehoiakim's fourth year. Chapter 25 connects that year with Nebuchadnezzar's first year as king of Babylon and recalls years of warnings the people had refused to heed. The danger was not a vague possibility invented to secure attention. The prophet was addressing a kingdom facing real judgement amid the rise of a powerful neighbour.

The later public reading occurs in the king's fifth year. Keeping those notices in view prevents us from compressing the entire chapter into a single afternoon. The text does not tell us every event between the writing and that reading. It does tell us that God's word reaches the people, the officials and the king through identifiable acts of writing, carrying and reading.

Following Samuel, the children now meet another prophet in a different period. Give that orientation briefly: many years have passed, Israel has had kings, and Jeremiah is speaking God's message to Judah. Their understanding does not depend on remembering a complete history of the kingdoms.

Notice, too, how much of the chapter is occupied with hearing. Baruch reads, Micaiah listens and reports, the officials ask for another reading, and the king finally hears. The repeated hearings slow the narrative down. The message is not a passing rumour or a warning no one had a chance to understand. Each new audience must respond to words that have already reached others. For a teacher, that is a searching setting in which to prepare. Familiarity with a passage is a gift, but familiarity alone is not the same as receiving it. The question follows the scroll into the room and then follows us into our own reading.

God has His warning written so people may turn — Jeremiah 36:1–8

The LORD tells Jeremiah to take a scroll and write the words He has spoken concerning Israel, Judah and the nations. The message reaches back to the beginning of Jeremiah's ministry under Josiah. Writing gives those spoken warnings a form that can be carried and read again. The prophet's inability to enter the temple will not prevent the people from hearing.

Baruch, the son of Neriah, serves as the scribe. Jeremiah dictates, and Baruch writes. Later, when the officials ask how the scroll was produced, Baruch explains that he wrote in ink as Jeremiah spoke. This is a useful glimpse into the human work through which God's word was communicated. We can honour the care of that work without imagining that the message originated in Baruch's creativity or Jeremiah's political preferences.

A scroll is a length of writing material that can be rolled and unrolled. It is not a bound book with pages to turn. Verse 23 mentions columns, which explains why the king can cut away portions as they are read. The passage identifies ink and a scribe's knife but does not identify the material of this particular scroll. There is no need to claim it was made of a particular skin or plant.

The purpose of writing appears in verse 3: the people may hear the coming disaster, turn from their evil ways and receive forgiveness. Warning and mercy belong in the same sentence. God is not enjoying their danger or hiding the way of return. He brings the truth to them so that they may respond while there is still a call to hear.

Jeremiah is restricted from entering the temple, though the chapter does not fully explain the restriction. Baruch must therefore read on a day of fasting when people from Judah's towns are present. Fasting here belongs to a gathered appeal before God. Yet a religious occasion cannot substitute for receiving the word being read. The hearers must turn from evil, not merely take part in the event.

This is the first important connection for the children. A warning can be part of care. A safe fictional example, such as being warned that a bridge is damaged, can help them understand why removing an unwelcome notice would not repair the danger. Keep the example brief. Judah's need concerns sin before God, and His invitation is to repentance and forgiveness, not simply to better risk management.

The king hears the word and destroys the scroll — Jeremiah 36:9–26

The public reading leads to another hearing. Micaiah reports what he has heard to the officials, who send for Baruch and listen themselves. Their questions establish where the written words came from. They recognise the seriousness of the message and say that the king must hear. They also tell Jeremiah and Baruch to hide. The account lets us see the danger surrounding the messengers without asking us to invent a secret escape story.

Jehudi brings the scroll to the king and reads it before him and the officials. We have now moved from the temple's public space to the ruler's winter quarters. A fire burns in front of the king. These details make the next action clear: the very fire warming the room becomes the means of destroying what has been read.

As Jehudi reads three or four columns, Jehoiakim cuts that portion from the scroll with the scribe's knife and throws it into the fire. The action continues until the whole scroll is consumed. This is a deliberate, repeated rejection. The king does not fail to hear because the writing is unavailable or the messenger has forgotten the words. He hears and refuses.

The narrator notes that the king and his servants do not become terrified or tear their clothes. Tearing clothing could express grief or distress; in 2 Kings 22, Josiah tears his clothes when he hears the book of the law. That earlier account gives a concrete contrast. The difference is not between owning a scroll and owning none. It is between being humbled by God's word and trying to dispose of its demands.

Some officials urge Jehoiakim not to burn it, but he will not listen. He then orders the arrest of Baruch and Jeremiah. God's protection of the two men is stated simply: the LORD hid them. We should be content with that statement. The chapter does not tell us the hiding place or the means, and the classroom does not need a fictional chase to make the account interesting.

The scroll really is destroyed. That detail prevents an easy but mistaken lesson about Bibles being impossible to burn. Paper, ink and other materials can be damaged; God's servants can face real danger. The king's failure lies elsewhere. Destroying the record cannot make God's warning untrue, remove Judah's guilt or place the ruler above the LORD who speaks.

Pause over that distinction yourself. We may never cut up a Bible, yet we can still prefer not to hear what unsettles us. The application should invite honest attention, not equate every lapse of concentration with Jehoiakim's deliberate contempt. Children need help with understanding and attention; the king is refusing a message he has heard.

God gives His word again and confirms its truth — Jeremiah 36:27–32

After the burning, the word of the LORD comes to Jeremiah again. God tells him to take another scroll and write the original words. The king has used his power to destroy a copy; God continues to speak. The sequence makes the lesson's title intelligible. Human rejection cannot cancel the LORD's authority or force Him to withdraw what is true.

The renewed message directly addresses Jehoiakim's objection to the warning about Babylon. It announces judgement upon the king and his household and repeats the coming disaster that the people had refused to hear. For children, state that God would hold the king and people responsible and that the warning about Babylon remained true. The adult reading includes severe details that need not be dramatised or described graphically.

Baruch writes again at Jeremiah's dictation, and further words are added. God's answer is not the unexplained reappearance of the burnt material. It includes renewed human labour: another scroll, another act of dictation and another act of writing. The LORD's sovereign purpose works through the faithful service He requires of His servants.

This gives a careful way to speak about preservation. In this account, God ensures that the king's destruction does not erase the prophetic word. We should not turn that particular event into a claim that every manuscript in history survives unchanged or that textual study is unnecessary. We can affirm what the passage plainly shows: the LORD remains free and faithful to make His word known.

The final question is therefore personal. If burning the scroll cannot cancel the warning, what should the hearer do? The answer was present near the beginning: hear, turn from evil and seek the mercy God offers. The story ends with judgement confirmed, but the lesson must remember the gracious invitation that makes the refusal so serious.

The forgiveness and new heart God promises

The people's need is deeper than possessing a replacement scroll. They need forgiveness and hearts willing to receive God's instruction. Jeremiah 31:31–34 addresses that need through the promise of a new covenant. God promises to put His teaching within His people and to forgive their sin. The prophetic book that exposes their refusal also announces His saving provision.

At the supper before His death, Jesus speaks of the new covenant in His blood. Luke 22:20 connects that covenant with the life He gives for His people. He does not make sin harmless or simply advise us to listen harder. He bears the cost of saving sinners through His death and rises again as the living Lord.

We therefore invite the children to turn from sin and trust Jesus for forgiveness. Their hope is not that they have avoided Jehoiakim's particular act or treated a paper scroll carefully enough. They need the mercy God supplies in Christ. Through His Spirit, God also changes His people so that His word becomes something they receive and live by.

This connection follows the book's own promise into its fulfilment. We do not need to make the burnt scroll a picture of Jesus' death or the second scroll a picture of His resurrection. Those parallels would distract from the stronger biblical line: persistent sin needs forgiveness and inward renewal, and God provides both through His saving covenant.

God's word has authority because God speaks it. The medium through which it reaches us matters, but the medium is not the source of that authority. Baruch's ink does not make Jeremiah's message divine, and the king's fire cannot make it cease to be divine. This distinction helps us value the Bible's physical care without treating a particular copy as magical.

Repentance means turning from sin towards God. It includes receiving His judgement about what is wrong rather than finding a way to make the warning disappear. It is not a payment that purchases mercy. God's gracious invitation and provision in Christ give sinners reason to turn and trust Him.

A teacher shares the responsibility to transmit Scripture faithfully. We may explain difficult words and select an age-appropriate reading, but we cannot change the meaning because a truth is uncomfortable. Honest simplification keeps the message; distortion replaces it.

Keeping the warning truthful and merciful

Why did God allow the scroll to burn?

The passage does not answer every question about why God permits opposition. It shows that the destruction was real and that it did not defeat His word. Avoid promising that believers or their possessions will always be protected from harm. The LORD's faithfulness is not measured by whether every object survives.

Does an accidentally damaged Bible mean someone has rejected God?

No. Jehoiakim hears the warning and deliberately attacks the scroll in refusal. An accidental tear, a worn book or a child's difficulty handling pages is a different matter. Teach respectful care without creating fear that a damaged page places someone beyond forgiveness.

Should we copy the burning to make the story memorable?

No. The account can be understood through words and the paper demonstration. No fire, heat, knives or destruction of a Bible is needed. Children will make and unroll a simple scroll bearing a short lesson summary; they will not act as the king or pretend that the summary is an original biblical manuscript.

Must a child obey anyone who says they speak for God?

No. Jeremiah's authority is established within Scripture; a person's present claim must not be accepted without testing. Teachers should explain the biblical text openly. No spiritual claim authorises secrecy, coercion or harm. Keep the lesson centred on receiving God's word, not on making adults unquestionable.

Bringing this to the children

Children should distinguish the damaged scroll from God's unaltered truth and understand why that truth calls us to mercy. The paper activity gives a visible message to open; it does not act out the king's destruction.

Have ready: Print Printable Resources single-sided at actual size: pages 1 and 3 for display, page 2 for each child, plus two adult copies for a completed sample and a loose demonstration set, and one Parent take-home per child. Have an open Bible, glue sticks, crayons, a tray and a scrap of paper for memory recall. An adult cuts both solid outside strip rectangles on page 2 before class. Make one sample: with captions upright, glue A's shaded JOIN area beneath B's left end, press flat and let it hold; roll both outer ends loosely inwards and reopen. Keep the second adult set and the children's two-strip sets separate. No rods, fire, knives or acted destruction are used. With your helper, practise the overlap and agree how to help joins hold while listening to the message children explain.

Remember together: Use page 3's complete Psalm 33:4, explain right and trustworthy, and connect the second phrase with God giving His words again. Support recall of the final phrase and return to the whole verse.



SCRIPTURE

For the word of the LORD is right,
and all his work is trustworthy.

Psalm 33:4, CSB

Listen for understanding: During making ask what happened after the burning; at the end ask how we should respond to God's correction. Help a child distinguish an accident from deliberate refusal and a damaged object from untrue words, then invite them to explain again.

Reflect before teaching:

- Which kind of biblical correction am I tempted to avoid hearing?
- Do I explain warnings as part of God's truthful call to repentance, or use them merely to secure compliance?
- What can Baruch's willingness to write again teach me about patient service?
- Can I distinguish respect for a Bible from trusting the God whose word it contains?

Pray before teaching:

Ask the LORD for a heart ready to receive His correction and grace. Thank Him that human refusal cannot overturn His truth. Pray for clear, patient explanation, for protection from manipulative teaching and for the children to hear the invitation to mercy through Jesus.

Keep all materials ordinary paper and glue. Read the captions and help children explain the order: God's warning was written, the king rejected it, and God gave His word again. Do not make the fire the exciting centre or compare an unsettled child to the king. The final invitation concerns hearing truth and turning to God for mercy.

Before you teach: explain why the scroll was written, how it reached the king, what the burning could and could not accomplish, and how the new-covenant promise leads to Jesus. Give a kind, truthful answer to a child worried about accidentally tearing a Bible page.

For further reading:

Jeremiah 36 supplies the writing materials, sequence and responses. Read it with Jeremiah 25, 2 Kings 22, Jeremiah 31:31–34 and Luke 22:19–20.

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