

“The Words of the Lord,” Jeremiah 36:1-8, 21-32 (November 23, 2014)

In the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, this word came to Jeremiah from the LORD: ²“Take a scroll and write on it all the words that I have spoken to you against Israel and Judah and all the nations, from the day I spoke to you, from the days of Josiah until today. ³It may be that the house of Judah will hear all the disaster that I intend to do to them, so that every one may turn from his evil way, and that I may 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 that he had spoken to him. ⁵And Jeremiah ordered Baruch, saying, “I am banned from going to the house of the LORD, ⁶so you are to go, and on a day of fasting in the hearing of all the people in the LORD’s house you shall read the words of the LORD from the scroll that you have written at my dictation. You shall read them also in the hearing of all the men of Judah who come out of their cities. ⁷It may be that their plea for mercy will come before the LORD, and that every one will turn from his evil way, for great is the anger and wrath that the LORD has pronounced against this people.” ⁸And Baruch the son of Neriah did all that Jeremiah the prophet ordered him about reading from the scroll the words of the LORD in the LORD’s house.

Then the king sent Jehudi to get the scroll, and he took it from the chamber of Elishama the secretary. And Jehudi read it to the king and all the officials who stood beside the king. ²²It was the ninth month, and the king was sitting in the winter house, and there was a fire burning in the fire pot before him. ²³As Jehudi read three or four columns, the king would cut them off with a knife and throw them into the fire in the fire pot, until the entire scroll was consumed in the fire that was in the fire pot. ²⁴Yet neither the king nor any of his servants who heard all these words was afraid, nor did they tear their garments. ²⁵Even when Elnathan and Delaiah and Gemariah urged the king not to burn the scroll, he would not listen to them. ²⁶And the king commanded Jerahmeel the king’s son and Seraiah the son of Azriel and Shelemiah the son of Abdeel to seize Baruch the secretary and Jeremiah the prophet, but the LORD hid them.

²⁷Now after the king had burned the scroll with the words that Baruch wrote at Jeremiah’s dictation, the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah: ²⁸“Take another scroll and write on it all the former words that were in the first scroll, which Jehoiakim the king of Judah has burned. ²⁹And concerning Jehoiakim king of Judah you shall say, ‘Thus says the LORD, You have burned this scroll, saying, “Why have you written in it that the king of Babylon will certainly come and destroy this land, and will cut off from it man and beast?”’ ³⁰Therefore thus says the LORD concerning Jehoiakim king of Judah: He shall have none to sit on the throne of David, and his dead body shall be cast out to the heat by day and the frost by night. ³¹And I will punish him and his offspring and his servants for their iniquity. I will bring upon them and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem and upon the people of Judah all the disaster that I have pronounced against them, but they would not hear.’ ”

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

PRAY

Today we wrap up our study in the book of Jeremiah – we just did a brief survey over seven weeks of the book – and come to what I think is one of the most jarring incidents in all of the Bible. We read how Jehoiakim, one of the kings of Judah, when he heard the Word of God spoken directly to him, rather than obey it, he took the scroll on which it was written, cut it up, and burned it.

And it wasn't just that Jehoiakim burned the Scriptures, it was how he did it. He burned the Scriptures coldly, with malice, without fear. Jeremiah 36:24: "Yet neither the king nor any of his servants who heard all these words was afraid, nor did they tear their garments." Jehoiakim is the king of God's people, one of the descendants of David, one of the ancestors of the Lord Jesus, and the Word of God is fresh, the ink is barely dry on the parchment because the words God gave to Jeremiah the prophet have so recently been written down. Yet he slices up the Scriptures and burns them. What can we learn from that?

I hope to show you three things about the Bible, about the Scriptures. We believe as Christians that the Bible consists of sixty-six books, thirty-nine in the Old Testament (which we share with Jews – they also believe the Old Testament is Holy Scripture) and twenty-seven books in the New Testament, which introduce us to Jesus and tell us the story of the work of the Holy Spirit in the early church. These are the Scriptures, and here are the three things I want you to see: *first, the source of the Scriptures. Second, the offensiveness of the Scriptures. Third, the inevitability of the Scriptures.*

First, the source of the Scriptures. Let's look at verses 1-2: "In the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, this word came to Jeremiah from the LORD: ²"Take a scroll and write on it all the words that I have spoken to you against Israel and Judah and all the nations, from the day I spoke to you, from the days of Josiah until today." Then in verse 4 we read that Jeremiah obeyed and did indeed write the word from the Lord down.

It's very simple what I want to show you: the source of the Scriptures, the author of the Bible, is God. These words are God's words. God spoke to Jeremiah, he dictated to Jeremiah, and Jeremiah wrote them down. God is the source of the Scriptures.

This does not mean that all Scripture was received through dictation. Not at all. Take, for example, Luke 1:1-4: "Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, ² just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, ³ it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely [NIV: "carefully investigated"] for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, ⁴ that you may

have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.” Now, did God dictate these words to Luke, and then Luke wrote them down, and we can read them in our Bibles? No – the Scriptures were received in a different way here. Luke went out and did the work of an investigative reporter – he interviewed witnesses from Jesus’ past, he examined documents (probably like the gospels of Matthew and Mark, which were written prior to Luke’s gospel), and from those sources he compiled his own book. Does that mean, then, the source of the gospel of Luke is not God? And the answer is: no. Even when God did not dictate Scripture directly, still he is the source of Scripture.

Sometimes God delivers his Word to the various biblical authors through direct communication, sometimes through dreams and visions, but sometimes he delivers his Word through the work of an investigative reporter – as Luke was. Sometimes he delivers his Word through the teaching of an apostle, like Paul, when he instructs the various New Testament churches in his letters. When Paul sat down to write the letter we know as 1 Corinthians, he did not hear a big, booming voice from the sky that said, “Paul, take a letter to those Christians at Corinth,” and then Paul said, “Yes, God,” and went and found a quill and parchment. No, those really were Paul’s words of instruction to the Corinthians.

And if you ask: “How, then, can it be said the source of Scripture is God when Paul or Luke or John or someone else wrote it?” “In cases where the ordinary human personality and writing style of the author were prominently involved . . . God’s providential oversight and direction of the life of each author was such that their personalities, their backgrounds and training, their abilities to evaluate events in the world around them, their access to historical data, their judgment with regard to the accuracy of information, and their individual circumstances when they wrote, *were all exactly what God wanted them to be, so that when they actually came to the point of putting pen to paper, the words were fully their own words but also fully the words that God wanted them to write, words that God would also claim as his own*” (Grudem, 81) (emphasis added).

God does claim every word in the Scriptures as his own, no matter who actually put the pen to paper, no matter the circumstances behind the writing. ¹⁶ All Scripture [every word of the sixty-six books of the Bible] is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

Now, I could imagine someone saying, “J.D., you say that we should believe that God wrote the Bible because the Bible says God wrote the Bible. That’s circular reasoning; that’s a logical fallacy. Christians say that the Scriptures are God’s Word because it claims to be God’s Word. And they believe it claims to be God’s Word because Scripture is God’s Word. That doesn’t prove anything.”

I can totally imagine someone in the audience right now, skeptical of Christianity, saying, “J.D., if you want me to believe the source of the Bible is the God of the universe, you’re going to have to do better than that. I am a natural skeptic, I need empirical proof before I will believe anything, and you must prove it to me before I can believe the Bible.”

So, if that's you, then I admit: you're right. Christians cannot provide empirical proof that God is the source of the Scriptures. But you must know that there are plenty of things you believe in for which you don't have empirical proof.

Remember the movie *The Matrix*? Remember the premise? Prove to me empirically that you're not living in the matrix? You can't, can you? Why? Because the whole point of the movie is that the whole human race has been deceived and we cannot trust what we perceive with our senses. You can't test things empirically if you can't trust your senses.

This is nothing new, by the way – philosophers have known this to be a problem for centuries. Four hundred years ago Rene Descartes said, “How do I know that right now I'm not dreaming?” You can't prove that right now you're not in a dream.

And if you say, “OK, J.D., OK. Maybe I don't base everything in my life on empirical proof. But I do base everything I believe and do on reason. I think it's unreasonable to believe that God is the source of the Scriptures, that some invisible God is behind this book, just like I think it's unreasonable to believe that right now I'm really in the matrix.”

OK, but how do you know that it's unreasonable to believe in the matrix? “Because reasonable people don't believe in the matrix.” Why don't reasonable people believe in the matrix? “Because it's unreasonable to believe in the matrix!” See, circular argument!

Friends, at the end of the day, as much as you would like to trust reason and have empirical proof for all your beliefs, you simply can't have it. Like it or not, faith plays a role in all our lives, even the skeptic, even the atheist, *because we all have to have faith in some things*, like that we can trust our senses, or like that we can rely on our memories, before we can function in this world.

Blasé Pascal, genius, mathematician, philosopher, Christian, calls these things we must have faith in “first principles,” and he says that the only way we can know them is through the heart: “We know the truth not only through our reason but also our heart. It is through the latter [our hearts] that we know first principles ... We know that we are not dreaming, but, however unable we may be to prove it rationally, our inability proves nothing but the weakness of our reason ... Our inability must therefore serve only to humble reason, which would like to be the judge of everything, but not to confute our certainty. As if reason were the only way to learn!” Pascal, *Penses*, 110.

No one on this planet learns everything by reason, Pascal says. There are other ways to learn. Sooner or later there are some things that we must believe simply accept as true, regardless of our inability to prove them.

And that, friends, is the ultimate reason you should believe that God is the source of the Scriptures. There is no airtight argument that can prove it. But there are no airtight arguments for all kinds of things you believe without question.

Yet as you read the Scriptures and pray over them in your heart, which is deeper and more powerful than your reason, you can come to believe they are from God. Belgic Confession: “And we believe [in the Scriptures] without a doubt all things contained in them – not so much because the church receives and approves them as such [and, I would add, not so much because we can prove them] but above all because the Holy Spirit testifies in our hearts that they are from God ...” God is the source of the Scriptures.

Certainly Jesus believed that. Jesus Christ was a Scripture-filled man. In fact, something like ten percent of all the words we have recorded that Jesus said are quotes from the Scripture. He was constantly saying, “It is written,” *gegraptai!* If you trust Jesus, then certainly you should trust that God is the source of the Scriptures.

Second, the offensiveness of the Scriptures. Let’s re-read that jarring portion in the middle of chapter 36 of Jeremiah (22-24): “It was the ninth month, and the king was sitting in the winter house, and there was a fire burning in the fire pot before him.²³ As Jehudi read three or four columns [of the Scriptures] the king would cut them off with a knife and throw them into the fire in the fire pot, until the entire scroll was consumed in the fire that was in the fire pot.²⁴ Yet neither the king nor any of his servants who heard all these words was afraid, nor did they tear their garments.”

Jeremiah was prophesying that soon the Babylonians would come and utterly destroy Jerusalem, and King Jehoiakim did not want to hear it. He wanted good news from God, and all he got was bad news, so he decided to cut the bad news out with a knife.

And this wasn’t just true of Jehoiakim – all of us, all of us, wish at some point that we could take a knife to certain parts of the Bible and get rid of it. One of the more famous examples of this is Thomas Jefferson, for example, our third president, did not believe in the possibility of miracles. But he loved the teachings of Jesus and thought they were from God. So, what did he do? He took a razor and cut out all the miracle stories from the four gospels. He just didn’t like the miracle stories, because he didn’t believe in the possibility of miracles on earth, so he got rid of them and made his own Bible. It’s still around today – the Smithsonian Institution has the original and has uploaded images of all of it on the internet.

You can see this tendency to dislike certain parts of the Bible in some of the so-called “culture war” disputes in our country today. So, for example, in more culturally liberal parts of the country, they love the Bible stories that have to do with helping the poor. My guess is that if you went onto the streets of New York or Boston or San Francisco with a megaphone and started preaching on those verses and encouraging people to help the poor, you’d meet with a lot of approval. But if you took a megaphone and started preaching on the same street corner from the same Bible on what it says about sex and marriage, my guess is you’d get a completely different reaction.

Likewise, in the South, we are culturally very conservative. So we tend to really agree with the parts of the Bible that talk about sexual ethics – sex is only appropriate inside of

marriage, and marriage can only be defined as between a man and a woman. In many of our churches, we really agree with those parts of the Bible and tend to camp out on them and talk about them a lot. I've been in meetings with Christians in Mississippi where the topic of discussion was supposed to be the dinner on the grounds next week, but somehow everyone ends up talking about gay marriage.

But those other passages about loving the poor, the widow, the orphan, and sharing your possessions and goods with those in need ... well, maybe we won't say we dislike those verses but we're quick to qualify them. I have heard so many Christians try to wiggle out of those verses. Yes, they'll say, we should help the poor, but you know God helps those who help themselves (which is not in the Bible, by the way). Yes, we should help the poor, but only the deserving poor, not the lazy poor. Yes, we should help the poor but the government takes too much of my money in taxes for me to help the poor. We're quick to embrace those passages that deal with sex, but quick to qualify, make excuses about or maybe even ignore those passages that deal with money.

Friends, the Scriptures have plenty in them to offend everyone. And I'll get personal. I've been married almost fifteen years, and my wife and I over that time have had many disputes, many conflicts. And at least two of them were my fault.

This is what the Bible says about husbands and their wives: ²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her..." Now, what's Paul doing in that verse? He's summarizing the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ. The gospel tells us that we are sinners, we have broken God's law and have offended his holy majesty, and we justly deserve hell because of it. But rather than give us what we deserve under the law, Jesus Christ came for us. He came after us as if we were his bride. And on the cross, he died for his bride. He went after his bride, he loved his bride, he humbled himself for his bride, he died for his bride, to reconcile us to God.

I can't tell you how many times I've been offended by that passage. Because I'm in this fight with my wife, and of course it's always at least partly my fault, but that verse pops into my head and tells me that what I'm supposed to do as a husband is humble myself, go to my wife, apologize to her for what I've done wrong (even if my wrong was only ten percent of the reason we're fighting, I'm to go to her first), and seek reconciliation. When I'm frustrated that's the last thing I want to hear.

But here's the thing: it's important that the Bible offend you. When you are in a real, personal relationship with someone else, sooner or later there will be conflict. Why? Because you're two different people, with two different wills, with two different sets of desires and often two agendas, so of course there will be conflict. If the Bible never offends you, never pushes you where you don't want to be pushed, never says things you don't like, then you can't really say you have a personal relationship with God, can you?

There is an old movie, a cult classic, called *The Stepford Wives*. Credit Tim Keller. The men of Stepford, CT got tired of having wives who talked back to them, who didn't wait on them hand and foot, who contradicted them, so they killed them and replaced them

with androids that looked like their wives. And the androids would only ever say one thing to their husbands, “Yes, dear, yes, dear.” They were just happy in the kitchen whipping up for their men whatever the men wanted.

But something was missing. What? The personal relationship was gone. You can’t have a personal relationship with an appliance. When all you ever hear is, “Yes, dear. Whatever you say, dear,” that’s not a person.

Friends, if you sit in judgment on the Bible and cut out all the stuff you don’t like – like Thomas Jefferson did – then you can’t really know God. You’ve put a gag in his mouth so that all he can ever say to you through his Word is “yes, dear, whatever you say dear.” If the Bible never offends you then you can’t really know God.

Third, the inevitability of Scripture. Verses 27-28, 32: ²⁷ Now after the king had burned the scroll with the words that Baruch wrote at Jeremiah’s dictation, the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah: ²⁸ “Take another scroll and write on it all the former words that were in the first scroll, which Jehoiakim the king of Judah has burned.” ³² Then Jeremiah took another scroll and gave it to Baruch the scribe, the son of Neriah, who wrote on it at the dictation of Jeremiah all the words of the scroll that Jehoiakim king of Judah had burned in the fire. And many similar words were added to them.”

Jehoiakim burned the scroll, he got rid of the prophecies he didn’t like, but it didn’t change anything. God just got Jeremiah to write down the words again. And we know from biblical history that the prophecies came true – the Babylonians did come and destroy Jerusalem and take the Jews off into exile, and Jehoiakim indeed died soon after, just like the prophecies said, probably in battle.

What can we learn from that? *The Scriptures will be fulfilled.* It is inevitable. At one point Jesus Christ says, “Heaven and earth may pass away but my word shall never pass away.” Matthew 24:35. The Scriptures will be fulfilled. What the Scripture says will come to pass – it is inevitable. What will come to pass?

The Scriptures say that one day, at the name of Jesus, every knee shall bow, in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. The Scriptures will be fulfilled, one day the rightful king will reign. It is inevitable. Psalm 2:1 (we read from it in our call to worship): “Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain?”

What should we do with that information? If the Scriptures will inevitably come true, we should do three things: *first, investigate them.*

If you’re here today and not a Christian, again welcome. But you need to know that the most important person who ever lived, Jesus Christ (he was the most important person- I don’t think anyone disputes that – he’s had more influence over the world than all the kings who’ve reigned and all the governments that have ever sat) – you need to know that the most important, the most influential person who has ever lived in the history of the

world has said that his word will never pass away (and we're going on two thousand years, and so far that's remained true) and that one day everyone will bow the knee to him.

When the most important person who has ever lived tells you something, you'd better have a good reason not to believe it. You're going to have to do better than, "Reasonable, intelligent people don't believe the Scriptures, because it is reasonable not to believe in them." No, that's the lazy way out. You're going to have to do better than try to refute a circular argument with a circular argument.

Listen, if after church you went to Kroger to shop for groceries, and you bumped into Phil Bryant, our governor, and you said, "Oh, hey, Governor Bryant, what are you doing in Oxford?" And he pulled you aside and said, "Well, don't tell anyone, but this week I'm going to call out the Mississippi National Guard, I'm going to cordon off Oxford, and we're going to keep all those dirty State fans from coming to the Egg Bowl."

Say that happened? What would you do? You'd walk out of Kroger wondering, "Is that true? Is he really going to do that? No maroon and white at the Egg Bowl?" And you'd investigate, you'd call your friends, you'd call the Chief of Police and the Sheriff if you knew them, to find out if this is true.

And I tell you what you wouldn't do – you wouldn't walk out of Kroger and say, "Reasonable, educated people like me never listen to Governor Bryant," and then act like nothing happened. Not tell anyone, not think about it again.

Friends, someone infinitely greater than Governor Bryant has told you something through the Scriptures, so you can't just dismiss it. You must check it out. One day every knee will bow to the Lord Jesus. I'm not saying you have to believe it because I've said it, but I am saying that it would be foolish for you to not investigate.

Second, obey them. Some of you are sitting here week after week month after month, year after year, and you claim to be a Christian, you certainly claim to believe the Bible, but you're not obeying it. You haven't submitted to the Scriptures. You've never really given your life to Christ. You're just here on Sundays for the show, because that's what decent people do on Sundays in the south – they go to church. I fear there are lots of people like that in Mississippi.

If that's you, friend, *you're in a dangerous place.* In Matthew 10 Jesus is giving the disciples instructions on how to preach the good news to Israel, and he says, "And if anyone will not receive you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet when you leave that house or town. ¹⁵ Truly, I say to you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town." Matthew 10:14-15.

Sodom and Gomorrah, you see, never heard the gospel, so when the time comes for Jesus to be revealed, as the Scriptures say, it won't be as bad for them as it will be for those who have heard the gospel.

The more knowledge you have of the Scriptures the more responsibility you have to carry it out. Luke 12:48: "Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more."

Say you call yourself a Christian, you believe the Bible, and you're listening to one more sermon, and Christian things are now a little clearer to you, and now you know a little better how you ought to be living and what you ought to be doing with your time, talents, and treasure. If that's you, do you realize what you're doing to yourself if you don't act on that information? Do you realize what I'm doing to you every time I teach? The Scriptures say that Jesus will come and ask, "What are you doing with those resources I've given you?" What will you say? "Oh, Jesus, I'm sorry, I didn't know"? You must obey if you believe.

Third, take comfort in the Scriptures. I imagine, though, there's a third group out there, who do really believe the Scriptures but are constantly convicted because they don't feel like they obey them well enough. Constantly feeling that you're letting God down because you fall short of what you're supposed to do.

If you're in that group take comfort. If you submit yourself to the Scripture with an attitude that says, "Lord Jesus, I am yours, do with me what you will," he'll work in you to make you what in your heart of hearts you want to be. The Scriptures have the power to change you, so take comfort.

Hebrews 4:12: ¹² For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

"Have Thine own way, Lord! Have Thine own way! Thou art the Potter, I am the clay. Mold me and make me after Thy will, While I am waiting, yielded and still." Soak yourselves in the power of the Scriptures, and guess what? Inevitably God will change you. You won't have to force it, but you will find over time that surely God is making you into who he wants you to be. Friends, do you trust the Scriptures? PRAY