

The Scroll Burned and Rewritten

Jeremiah 36

90 minutes · Win, Build, Send inductive format

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim. Participants watch the word of God survive a direct, physical assault: a king slices Scripture apart with a penknife and feeds it to a fire, column by column, and the word comes back longer. Along the way they get the Bible's clearest window into its own production, prophet, secretary, dictation, rewriting, and they discover the two possible responses to the word: the father who tore his garments, and the son who tore the scroll. Thread 3, the watched word, resolves tonight.

Catholic Touchstone. God is the author of Scripture, and He inspired its human authors as true authors (CCC 105-106). Yet Christianity is not a religion of the book: it is the religion of the Word of God, not a written and mute word but the Word incarnate and living (CCC 108).

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

- **The Bible shows us its own workshop.** God commands: "Take a scroll and write on it all the words that I have spoken to you" (36:2). Jeremiah dictates; Baruch son of Neriah writes (36:4). This is the clearest scene of biblical composition in the Bible: revelation passing through a prophet's voice and a secretary's pen. It is a striking example of what the Church's doctrine of inspiration affirms, God the author, working through human authors who are true authors (CCC 105-106), though it is one mode of composition, not the model for every biblical book: God worked in and through each writer's own faculties and powers.
- **The stated purpose.** "It may be that the house of Judah will hear all the evil which 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" (36:3). This scroll exists to produce conversion. Turning is what this word was sent to do, and conversion remains central to everything Scripture is for.
- **The chain of transmission.** Watch how the word actually travels in this chapter: Jeremiah dictates to Baruch; Baruch reads aloud in the Temple; Micaiah hears and reports to the officials; the officials summon Baruch and hear it again; they report to the king; Jehudi reads it to the king (36:4-21). The written word moves on a relay of living voices, readers, and reporters. As in most of the ancient world, the many encountered the word by hearing it read aloud. File this for the steelman.
- **The penknife and the brazier.** It is winter; the king sits by the fire. As Jehudi reads three or four columns, Jehoiakim slices them off with a scribe's penknife and drops them in the brazier, until the entire scroll is consumed (36:22-23). Coolly, at leisure, in installments. Not rage: contempt.
- **The devastating contrast.** Verse 24: "Yet neither the king, nor any of his servants who heard all these words, was afraid, nor did they rend their garments." The narrator chose those words to

detonate a memory: when Jehoiakim's own father, King Josiah, heard the newly found book of the law read, "he rent his clothes" (2 Kings 22:11) and led the greatest reform in Judah's history. The father tore his garments at the word; the son tore the word. Your group will find this contrast themselves in Q6.

- **The ending.** God's response: "Take another scroll, and write on it all the former words" (36:28), plus judgment on the king, and the quiet punchline of verse 32: "and many similar words were added to them." The word came back longer. You cannot edit God with a penknife; you can only enlarge the second edition.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

Roots. The scene answers Josiah's scroll in 2 Kings 22: the same dynasty, one generation apart, hearing the same kind of document with opposite hearts. Behind both stands the claim of Isaiah: "The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand for ever" (Isaiah 40:8), and Jeremiah's own almond branch: "I am watching over my word to perform it" (1:12), with the word "like fire" (23:29), an image tonight's chapter will put to a literal test.

Fulfillment. Jesus stakes the same claim on His own words, a claim no mere creature could rightly make: "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away" (Matthew 24:35). St. Peter hands Isaiah's line to the baptized: "the word of the Lord abides for ever" (1 Peter 1:25). And history has run Jehoiakim's experiment at scale, Diocletian's edicts ordering the Scriptures burned, centuries of bans and bonfires, and the book in your group's hands tonight is the result of every attempt. The word has outlived every fire set under it, and every empire that lit one.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

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St. Jerome · *Prologue to his Commentary on Isaiah, quoted at CCC 133*

The saint who opened this study closes its Scripture arc: ignorance of the Scriptures, St. Jerome insisted, is ignorance of Christ. The man gave his life to the sacred page, translating it in a cave in Bethlehem, because he believed the scroll Jehoiakim burned and God rewrote was worth every hour a human life could give it.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Ephrem the Syrian · *Commentary on the Diatessaron*

St. Ephrem, deacon and Doctor, compared the word of God to a spring: the thirsty drink and rejoice, but no one drinks the spring dry. What each reader carries away is enough for him, and what remains is inexhaustible for all who come after. A word like that survives fire the way a spring survives a torch.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Augustine · *Confessions, Book VIII*

St. Augustine's whole life turned on the scroll's stated purpose (36:3): that hearing, a man may turn. In a garden in Milan he heard a child chant "take and read," opened the Scriptures, read a few lines of St. Paul, and rose a different man. The word that survives its enemies also converts them; Augustine had been one.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

- **CCC 105-106** · God is the author of Sacred Scripture and inspired its human authors, who are true authors: the Jeremiah-and-Baruch scene in doctrinal form.
- **CCC 108** · the Christian faith is not a religion of the book but of the Word of God: not a written and mute word, but incarnate and living.
- **CCC 133** · the Church forcefully exhorts the faithful to frequent reading of Scripture, for ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ.
- **CCC 80-82** · Scripture and Tradition flow from the same divine wellspring (CCC 80); the Church does not derive her certainty about revelation from Scripture alone (CCC 82). Background for the steelman chain; keep in the leader guide.

THREAD WATCH

THREAD WATCH · LEADER ONLY · THREAD 3 RESOLVES TONIGHT

Thread 3 · The Watched Word: RESOLVES TONIGHT. The claim of 1:12 goes through a literal fire and holds: the word is dictated, burned column by column, and rewritten with additions. The word is like fire (23:29), and fire is not what a brazier destroys. Q9 lands the resolution; make sure the group connects all three texts themselves: 1:12, 23:29, 36:32. Celebrate openly; this thread's secrecy ended when Session 8's did.

Thread 2 · The Prophet Like Jeremiah. For your pocket only, and next week it comes out of the pocket: a king destroys the word of God, and the word returns, enlarged, indestructible. There is another Word that men destroyed, who returned. Say nothing whatsoever tonight. Close the session by telling the group: next week, the question this study has been hiding since night one finally gets asked, by a crowd, to Jesus, and the answer has Jeremiah's name in it. Bring your Bibles.

Thread 1 · Build and Plant. Resolved and resting. If it comes up, enjoy it.

SESSION GOALS

1. Participants can retell the chapter and describe the Bible's own picture of its composition: God, prophet, secretary, scroll.
2. Participants discover the Josiah-Jehoiakim contrast themselves and can name the two possible responses to the word.

3. Participants hear the sola scriptura case at full strength and can respond from the chapter's own chain of living transmission and CCC 81-82 and 108.
4. Participants resolve Thread 3 themselves: 1:12, 23:29, and 36:32 in one line of sight.
5. Participants examine their own penknife habits, the parts of God's word they quietly excise, and commit to reading Scripture daily this week.

TIME NOTE (90 MINUTES)

Opening prayer and Win: 15 minutes. Build: 55 minutes. Send and Live It This Week: 15 minutes. Closing prayer, memory verse, and next-week announcement: 5 minutes.

If you are running long: compress Question 2 (the transmission chain) into its answer summary and cut Question 8 (Matthew 24:35) to a single reading without discussion. Never cut the Josiah discovery, the steelman, or the Thread 3 resolution.

The Scroll Burned and Rewritten

Jeremiah 36

OPENING PRAYER

"Father, Your word is like fire, and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces. Tonight, as we watch a king try to burn it, show us our own penknives: the pages we skip, the commands we trim, the words we would rather warm ourselves against than obey. Let Your word read us. Through Christ our Lord. Amen." (Opening Prayer)

WIN • OPENING QUESTIONS (15 MIN)

W1. Has a book, a letter, or even a single sentence ever actually changed the direction of your life? What was it, and why did it get through?

W2. Be honest: is there any part of the Bible you tend to skip, explain away, or quietly wish were not there? You do not have to name it out loud, but picture it.

BUILD • INDUCTIVE STUDY (55 MIN)

READ JEREMIAH 36:1-8 ALOUD.

1. Verses 2-4 show us something rare: the Bible describing its own production. Who speaks, who writes, and what does verse 3 say the scroll is for?

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

God speaks to Jeremiah; Jeremiah dictates "all the words of the LORD"; Baruch son of Neriah writes them on a scroll (36:2-4). And the stated purpose: "that every one may turn from his evil way, and that I may forgive their iniquity and their sin" (36:3). The scene is a vivid instance of what the Church teaches about inspiration: God is the author, and the human writers are true authors, really writing (CCC 105-106), each in his own faculties and manner. And this scroll's stated purpose is not merely to inform but to turn, a purpose that remains central to all of Scripture. A Bible that has been read but has turned nothing in you has not yet finished the work it was sent to do in you.

2. (*Compress if short on time.*) Trace the word's journey from God's mouth to the king's ears through verses 4-21. Count the links in the chain. What carries the written word at every stage?

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

God to Jeremiah; Jeremiah's dictation to Baruch's pen; Baruch's voice reading in the Temple; Micaiah's ears and report; the officials summoning Baruch to hear it again; their report to the king; Jehudi's voice reading at court (36:4-21). Seven links at least, and every one of them is a living person: the written word travels on voices, readers, and witnesses. In this chapter, as through most of history, people received the word of God read aloud in assembly, which is how most Christians across the centuries have received it too. The word of God has never been a solitary text; it has always been a text carried by a community. Hold this thought; it returns shortly.

READ JEREMIAH 36:20-26 ALOUD. LET THE PENKNIFE SCENE LAND IN FULL.

3. Watch the king's technique in verse 23: not one dramatic gesture but columns, three or four at a time, sliced and burned as the reading proceeds. What does the method tell you about the heart? Is this rage?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

It is worse than rage: it is contempt at leisure. Jehoiakim listens just long enough to cut, warming himself at a fire fed by the word of God, editing revelation with a scribe's own tool. Rage at least takes the word seriously. The penknife treats it as negotiable material. Ask the group to sit with the picture, because it is the honest portrait of selective religion: hearing in installments, keeping the fire comfortable, trimming as we go.

4. Verse 24 is the narrator's quiet verdict: no fear, no torn garments. Why torn garments? What would tearing your clothes at a reading signify, and who is conspicuously not doing it?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Tearing garments was Israel's bodily grammar for grief and repentance before a devastating word. The narrator says the king and all his servants heard everything and felt nothing (36:24). Three officials did beg the king not to burn it (36:25), the faithful minority in every institution, but the room stayed comfortable. The scariest response to the word of God in this chapter is not the penknife. It is the composure.

5. Live discovery. The narrator wrote verse 24 to detonate a memory about this king's own father. One generation earlier, another scroll was read to another king of Judah. Find 2 Kings 22:11: who was the king, and what did he do when he heard the words?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

"And when the king heard the words of the book of the law, he rent his clothes" (2 Kings 22:11). The king was Josiah, Jehoiakim's father, and his torn garments launched the greatest reform in Judah's history. Same dynasty, same kind of scroll, one generation apart: the father tore his garments at the word; the son tore the word. Every hearer of Scripture can find themselves somewhere between those two kings at every reading, and the contrast searches us: even boredom, held long enough,

does a penknife's quiet work.

Steelman: Does This Chapter Prove Sola Scriptura?

BUILD THE CASE AT FULL STRENGTH: PRESENT THIS AS PERSUASIVELY AS A THOUGHTFUL PROTESTANT FRIEND WOULD

The case: “Look at what God does when His people apostatize: He commissions a scroll. And be precise about what we Protestants actually claim: not that the church has no teachers, councils, or creeds; we cherish them. Sola scriptura means Scripture is the only INFALLIBLE rule of faith. Pastors and councils carry real, God-given, ministerial authority, but fallible authority, always correctable by the word, the way the officials in this very chapter stood under the scroll rather than over it. Scripture is God-breathed and equips the man of God for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17), and God guards it Himself: no institution saved this scroll from the fire; God did, as He promised, ‘I am watching over my word to perform it.’ So when Rome claims an infallible Magisterium whose interpretations bind as surely as Scripture itself, that is the move we refuse: it sets a second, unfalsifiable rule beside the only one God authored. The lesson of Jeremiah 36 is that God’s word judges its handlers, every one. Scripture alone is the final court.” This is the strongest form of the argument, and much of it a Catholic can warmly affirm. Present it with full conviction.

6. First press: start with agreement, then test the “self-sufficient” claim against the chapter itself. Everything this argument says about the word’s inspiration and indestructibility, does the Catholic Church affirm it? And in the chapter, how does the self-sufficient word actually reach a single human being?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Affirm the agreements loudly: Scripture is God-breathed; its books “firmly, faithfully, and without error teach that truth which God, for the sake of our salvation, wished to see confided” to them (CCC 107); it is indestructible and sovereignly protected: the Church stakes her life on all of it, and this study has been one long act of that reverence. Now the chapter’s own evidence: at no point does the scroll act alone. It reaches every hearer through the chain we traced in Q2: a prophet, a secretary, public reading in the Temple, faithful officials, living voices at every link. The word and its bearers arrive together; the chapter cannot show us one without the other. Even the scroll’s survival runs through a person: God’s protection took the form of Jeremiah and Baruch, hidden by God (36:26), dictating it all again. God watched over His word by means of a living, commissioned community. That is not an argument against Scripture’s supremacy; it is the Bible’s own picture of how supreme Scripture operates.

7. Second press: notice verse 32’s last clause: “and many similar words were added to them.” Who had the authority to add to the scroll of God’s word, and what does that tell us about how the canon we hold actually grew? Then let the Catechism say the surprising sentence.

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

The living prophetic ministry added to it: the second scroll is longer than the first, expanded under inspiration, at God's own command, through the same commissioned man and secretary. Jeremiah 36 shows inspired prophetic expansion under God's direction, not a church adding to Scripture on its own authority; the canon question is its own, separate argument, and history answers it the same direction: the books were written, gathered, tested, and recognized within the believing community across centuries, with no complete New Testament in the Church's first generations and no inspired table of contents dropped from heaven. Scripture and the Church's living Tradition "flow from the same divine wellspring" (CCC 80); the Magisterium, remember from Session 8, serves the word rather than ruling it (CCC 86). And then the Catechism's startling sentence, worth reading aloud: the Christian faith is not "a religion of the book" but of the Word of God, "not a written and mute word, but incarnate and living" (CCC 108). Our friend is right that God's word needs no merely human guardian. The Catholic addition is only this: the same God who guards the scroll also gave it a family to live in, and gave the family a Word who is more than a scroll.

READ JEREMIAH 36:27-32 ALOUD.

8. (*Read without discussion if short on time.*) Someone once claimed for His own words the indestructibility this chapter proves about God's. Find Matthew 24:35 and read it aloud. What is Jesus claiming about Himself by saying this?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

"Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away" (Matthew 24:35). Isaiah said the word of our God stands forever (Isaiah 40:8); Jesus says it about His own sentences. No prophet ever dared that; Jeremiah's words survived because GOD watched over them. Jesus puts His words in the category reserved for God's, which is either the most staggering blasphemy in history or a quiet disclosure of who has been speaking all along.

9. Thread resolution. Put three verses side by side and read them in order: Jeremiah 1:12, then 23:29, then 36:32. What promise was made, what was the word said to be, and what did tonight prove?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

"I am watching over my word to perform it" (1:12). "Is not my word like fire?" (23:29). "And many similar words were added to them" (36:32). The promise of the almond branch was made on night one of this study; tonight it went through a literal fire and came out longer. The word is like fire, and the flames in the brazier were the junior element in that transaction. Twenty-six centuries of penknives, braziers, edicts, and empires later, your group read the scroll tonight. The watch has never once failed.

10. Bring it home to W2. Jehoiakim's penknife worked in installments: a column here, a column there. What are the respectable, modern forms of the penknife, and which column is your own knife hovering over?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Let the group generate them: the teachings we treat as optional because they cost us; the verses we historicize into harmlessness; the Sunday readings we sit through unafraid; the moral demands we trim to fit the life we already planned. Nobody burns a whole Bible anymore; we cut columns. The alternative is Josiah's posture: let the word tear something, and reform accordingly. The word will survive our editing either way; verse 32 guarantees it. The only open question is whether we will.

SEND · CLOSING QUESTIONS (15 MIN)

S1. Between Josiah and Jehoiakim, torn garments and the penknife, where has your response to God's word actually been living lately?

S2. The scroll's purpose was "that every one may turn." What is the one turning your reading of Scripture has been politely avoiding?

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

- Read Scripture every day this week, even five minutes, and read it Josiah-style: before you begin, pray one sentence: Lord, tear something.
- Identify your most-avoided column, the teaching or passage from W2, and read it slowly once this week, asking what obedience to it would cost and what it would give.
- Thank God once this week, explicitly, for the sheer existence of your Bible: dictated, burned, rewritten, copied, smuggled, translated, and watched over all the way to your shelf.

CLOSING ANNOUNCEMENT

LEADER: SAY THIS AT THE VERY END, AND TAKE NO QUESTIONS

Next week: the question this study has been quietly hiding since the first night finally gets asked out loud, by a crowd, to Jesus Himself, and the answer has Jeremiah's name in it. Bring your Bible.

CLOSING PRAYER

"Father, Your word has outlived every fire set beneath it. Forgive our penknives: the columns we cut, the commands we trim, the composure we keep where our fathers tore their garments. Give us hearts that let Your word do its work: to burn, to break, to turn, and to forgive. And keep watching over Your word in us, to perform it. Through Christ our Lord. Amen." (Closing Prayer)

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

"Then the LORD said to me, 'You have seen well, for I am watching over my word to perform it.'" (Jeremiah 1:12, RSV2CE · the promise this session proved)

Every Passage in This Session

Jeremiah 36

Primary Text

- Jeremiah 36:1-8 · dictation, Baruch, the scroll's purpose (Q1)
- Jeremiah 36:9-21 · the chain of transmission (Q2, compressible)
- Jeremiah 36:22-26 · the penknife and the brazier; the three who begged (Q3-Q4)
- Jeremiah 36:27-32 · the second scroll, longer (Q7, Q9)

Old Testament Roots

- 2 Kings 22:11 · Josiah tears his garments (live discovery, Q5)
- Isaiah 40:8 · the word stands forever (Q8 support)
- Jeremiah 1:12; 23:29 · the watch and the fire (Thread 3 resolution, Q9)

New Testament Fulfillment

- Matthew 24:35 · my words will not pass away (live find, Q8)
- 1 Peter 1:24-25 · the word of the Lord abides for ever (leader background)
- 2 Timothy 3:16-17 · the steelman text

Catechism

- CCC 105-106 · inspiration: God the author, humans true authors
- CCC 108 · not a religion of the book
- CCC 133 · ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ
- CCC 81-82, 86 · Scripture and Tradition; the serving Magisterium (steelman, leader only)