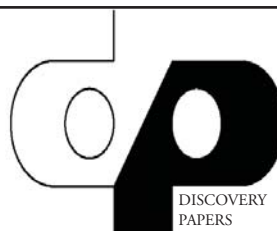


# WHAT IS SO SPECIAL ABOUT THE BIBLE?

**SERIES: *WEEPING IN WORSHIP***



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Paul Taylor  
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Many of you know that I'm fond of showing movie clips as ways to introduce us to some of the themes that we're going to be talking about that morning. Well today, my movie clip is a bit of a preview because the movie hasn't even been released on DVD yet, but here's a clip the studio did release.

It's from a movie called *The Book of Eli*. The story takes place after some kind of worldwide devastation and follows a man named Eli who is tasked with carrying a very precious book across the country. This book is the only copy of its kind left in existence after the apocalypse. As he tries to do this, he encounters other people who want this book as well. Let's watch this clip ...

[*The Book of Eli* clip]

This book that Eli is carrying is the best-selling book in the history of the world by a factor of at least three. It's the book that people have been executed for translating. It's the book that we hold in high esteem around here. This book is, of course, the Bible. So why all the fuss? What is it about this book? What Is So Special About the Bible?

It's a good question for us to be asking because we call ourselves Peninsula Bible Church. If you ask people what we're known for as a church, most people will say "teaching the Bible." We study this book, we preach this book, and we debate about this book. We must think it's pretty special, but why? And the big question that follows ... what do we hope to get out of this book? Why is it so special?

Well, we're in the middle of a series on Jeremiah right now. Last week we saw God speak through Jeremiah about a tricky subject: the Hebrew command of the Sabbath. Now, Jeremiah was all about preaching on tricky subjects and they often got him into a big mess. We're going to see that again today. This week we're looking at how God asked Jeremiah, not just to preach, but to write and how that ended up giving us this book that we think is so special.

So today we're looking at the whole chapter of Jeremiah 36 which tells a story, but in the interest of time I'll be reading excerpts from it to tell the whole story. This is one of the few stories in the Bible that talks about the Bible. I think we'll be challenged to see how God communicated His message, what He hoped it would result in, what it actually resulted in, and then what He did about it.

So let's look at Jeremiah 36 and find out what is so special about this book.

## God speaks

We'll start out by reading the first three verses of this chapter to get some of the background and understand the command that God is giving to Jeremiah.

Jeremiah 36:1-3

**In the fourth year of Jehoiakim 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 speaking to you in the reign of Josiah till now. 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; then I will forgive their wickedness and their sin."**

The first part of this passage gives us some background for this story. We learn that these events happen in the fourth year of Jehoiakim. That's around 605 BC, just before the Babylonians conquered Jerusalem for the first time. It's also the date of a very significant military event in the ancient world called the Battle of Carchemish. At this battle, the Assyrians (who had conquered the northern tribes of Israel 100 years earlier) were finally destroyed by the Babylonians. So after this battle, the Babylonians sealed their position as the new bully in town.

This message from God comes during a time of great political upheaval. Israel is caught in the middle of world powers around rising and falling. And she is asking the question of what to do in the midst of this complex political situation. Aren't we kind of like this? Aren't we in midst of political upheaval, economic upheaval, personal upheaval, in some way most of the time. Aren't we familiar with big decisions and great change? So what does God do in the midst of upheaval? Well, it's simple. He speaks. God speaks into the chaos.

And that's what He does here. In the midst of upheaval, God speaks into the chaos. So what's special about this book? Well, it's a divine book. This book comes from God. The Bible is divine.

This sounds pretty familiar to us. We know that this is supposed to be God's Word. In fact, some of us spend a lot of time defending that to other people. We live in a world where a lot of people claim to have a divine book, so we need to defend the fact that ours really is divine. But what about stopping and asking what it means to us that this book is divine? What type of response should we have to a divine book?

If God speaks to us in this book, what should we do about it? What I love about this passage is God doesn't just speak, He says exactly how He hopes His people will respond to His voice. Look at verse 3. He says perhaps they will hear, they will turn, and if they do, I will forgive. This is what God wants. This is how He wants His people to respond to His voice. He wants us to hear His Word, turn toward Him, and then He will forgive us. We're going to use this phrase from verse 3 as a guide this morning to think about responding to God's word. The first thing God wants is for us to hear. The Bible is divine. And when God speaks, He wants us to hear him. Will you hear God?

Most of us have a pretty hard time hearing anything these days. There are so many voices that we need to ignore. When nine out of every ten emails is spam and everyone wants to sell us something, how do we even decide what to listen to? Most of us find it easier to talk than listen anyway. Lily Tomlin used to say that we need to "listen with an intensity most people save for talking." We don't really know how to listen when someone's talking to us.

We need to learn how to hear God. Speech is the beginning of something. My wife sometimes wears earplugs in bed and sometimes I'll

forget and I'll say something to her; I'll say it again, and when she doesn't respond I think, "Wow — she's really being rude. Is she mad at me?" Then I'll remember that she has earplugs in. God's speech to us is meant to be the beginning of a conversation, but it has to start with hearing.

## People Respond

So we've seen that the first thing God wants is for us to hear Him. As we read on we find out what actually happens.

Jeremiah 36:4-7

**So Jeremiah called Baruch son of Neriah, and while Jeremiah dictated all the words the LORD had spoken to him, Baruch wrote them on the scroll. Then 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 their 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."**

Jeremiah 36:11-12

**When Micaiah son of Gemariah, the son of Shaphan, heard all the words of the LORD from the scroll, he went down to the secretary's room in the royal palace, where all the officials were sitting: Elishama the secretary, Delaiah son of Shemaiah, Elnathan son of Acbor, Gemariah son of Shaphan, Zedekiah son of Hananiah, and all the other officials.**

This scroll that Jeremiah wrote is read in the midst of all the people. Micaiah, who is the son of one of the king's officials, hears it and thinks that it is something special. So he brings it up to all the king's officials because he thinks it is pretty important.

One thing that strikes me in this part of the passage is how many people are involved with this message from God. We find out later in the passage, that the message to surrender to the Babylonians was meant for the king.

Now follow this ... God wants to say something to the king. So he tells Jeremiah to pick up a scroll. Jeremiah tells Baruch what God tells Jeremiah and Baruch writes it down. Then Baruch reads the scroll and Micaiah gets excited about it and tells all the officials about it. What we find out later is that the officials get excited about what Micaiah said, that Baruch had written, that Jeremiah told him to write, that God told Jeremiah. So finally the king hears this message for him that came to him through Jeremiah, Baruch, Micaiah, and all these officials.

A second ago I said that one of the special things about this book is that it is a divine book. And it is, but God could have just spoken to the king, right? If He spoke to Jeremiah, He could have spoken directly to the king. But He didn't; He used other people. So on the one hand; we know that this is a divine book, but we also know that it is a human book. A lot of people have been involved in this book: authors, editors, scribal copyists, translators, publishers ... And that just gets the book into our hands. Then there are preachers, teachers, parents, friends, and spiritual leaders that play a role in getting it from our hands into our heads and hearts.

So another thing that is special about this book is that it is a human book. This is a divine book and this is a human book. The Bible is human.

Now, that sounds familiar. There's something else that we believe in

that is divine and human. In fact, it is someone else and is also referred to in several places as the Word of God — the living Word. Wow. So Jesus is fully divine and Jesus is fully human. He is the Word of God and this is the Word of God. The Bible is fully divine and it is fully human. Just like Jesus.

We said earlier that God wanted us to hear this book as His voice, but one of the things that sometimes makes it hard for people to hear it is precisely this point. Because this is obviously a human book. Isaiah writes differently from Jeremiah. Mark's gospel has a different emphasis than John's gospel. Paul's theology seems to develop in the course of the New Testament. It was through several councils of people in the first few centuries that decided which books should even be in the Bible. Starting sometime around the 19th century, people starting realizing just how human this book is. Eventually they decided that because it was so human, it couldn't be divine. They decided that this was only a human book and they claimed that we shouldn't really listen to a human book.

But how could we listen to it if it weren't human? How could we hear it? The fact that this book is divine means we should listen to it. The fact that it is human means that we can listen to it. We can't emphasize enough that this book is written by God and yet we can't emphasize enough that this book is written by men. This is not like the Koran — God didn't dictate to scribes. It's not like the book of Mormon — it didn't magically appear in our hands. This is a fully human book and that idea makes a lot of people nervous because we think if it's fully divine, how can it be fully human?

Remember one thing that marks Christianity is paradoxes. Christ is fully God. Christ is fully human. God chooses people to save. People choose to respond to God and be saved. When you resolve these paradoxes, you get heresy. Christianity is full of statements that are both true at the same time even though they seem to conflict. This is a divine book. This is a human book.

One of my professors in seminary, Daniel Wallace, spoke at this church a few years ago and he made the point that Evangelicals, in their efforts to defend the Bible's divine nature, have sometimes forgotten the human nature of Scripture. When some people started claiming this book was only human, some Evangelicals, in their effort to correct that, sometimes claimed that this book was only divine. We can say this book is fully human without diminishing its divinity. They are both true, together, at the same time.

So this book gets people all excited and finally it makes its way to the king. The story reaches a bit of a climax as the book finally arrives in the king's chambers.

Jeremiah 36:21-22

**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 and all the officials standing beside him. It was the ninth month and the king was sitting in the winter apartment, with a fire burning in the firepot in front of him.**

This chapter continues to build to this point. It takes two verses for the scroll to be written and then nineteen more before it finally finds its way to its intended recipient: the king. It's like the story has gone into slow motion and here we are, just waiting to see what will happen.

Before we find out how he responds to this Word from Jeremiah, we need to realize that this unfolding story would have been familiar in the day of Jeremiah. You see, this chapter of Jeremiah bears a striking resemblance to something that happened about eighteen years earlier. We read about this event in 2 Kings 22-23.

Jehoiakim's father Josiah was king before him and he was a remarkable king. He was a young king, but he actually seems to care about YHWH—the God of His people. Josiah used a bunch of money to renovate the temple complex, which had fallen into disarray. He sent his scribe to the high priest Hilkiah with instructions to renovate the temple. While he was doing that, Hilkiah found something that looked kind of special. It was the “book of the law,” probably the book of Deuteronomy. The scribe brought it back to Josiah, the king. Apparently, by this point, Israel had completely lost their revelation from God and Josiah seemed interested. So he sat down and listened to this book, this message from God being read.

Josiah and Jehoiakim are both faced with the same situation. They are both presented with the Word of God and they both sit down to listen to their scribes read it. How do they respond?

I help out in my children's kindergarten science class. One thing I've noticed is that a simple instruction like “draw a picture of this leaf” can result in many different responses. One student stands on the table, one puts a pencil up her nose, one stares at me, and one actually draws a picture of a leaf. Same instructions, but different responses. Well, that's what happens here.

So when Josiah heard the “book of the law” read, he was horrified. He was convicted. He tore his robes. He burned down the high places—the altars to idols. He reinstated the holy celebration of Passover—he threw a huge religious party. This is why 2 Kings 23:25 says that there was no king as faithful to God either before him or after him. In short, Josiah heard and he did what God wanted His people to do after they heard Him. He turned. He turned back to God. He turned the whole nation back to God.

First, we remember that God wanted us to hear His voice and then turn back to Him. This is a special book because it is a relational book. It's an invitation from God to turn toward Him. This book is how we encounter God. The Bible is relational.

Some of you have heard of the acronym for the Bible, BIBLE: Basic Instructions Before Leaving Earth. Well, the Bible certainly has a lot to say about how we should live our lives, but that's not actually its primary objective. In John 5:39 Jesus said: “You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me.” Wow. So this book isn't even given primarily so that we can possess eternal life. It's given so that we can know Jesus. This Bible is primarily relational—it's about knowing God.

So if this is a relational book, how did Jehoiakim respond to this invitation? Did he turn to God like Josiah?

Jeremiah 36: 23-25

**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, 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.**

When Josiah heard the Word of God, he turned back to God. 2 Kings says that he tore his clothes in mourning and burned down the altars to foreign gods. However, when his son Jehoiakim was faced with the Word of God, he responded differently. He didn't tear his clothes or burn down the altars. He tore the scroll and burned the Words. The text gives us such a powerful picture of this man's audacity. He systematically slices off the Words from the scroll, column by column, and places them into

the fire. The careful way he does this makes it that much more chilling. He doesn't just hear it out, get mad, crumple it up, and throw it away. Phrase by phrase, he systematically destroys the written Word of God.

God wanted His people to hear His Word and turn to Him. Josiah did those things. Jehoiakim didn't. When we read two stories like this, we are forced into the question: Who are we more like? Are we more like Josiah or more like Jehoiakim? Will we turn like Josiah or burn the text like Jehoiakim? Old preachers used to say “turn or burn.” Well, this is a bit different, but it's the same question. When you hear the Word of God, will you turn to God?

Just like our five kindergartners, there is another option. Josiah turned toward God. Jehoiakim burned the scroll. We're Peninsula Bible Church, we wouldn't dare burn the scroll, but if there's a faulty response that's characteristic of us, it's that we are content to learn the scroll. We don't burn it, but we don't turn either. We're happy just to learn.

We like the scroll here. We like to study it. We like to find out what it says, find all the historical connections, and see all the cool literary devices. We like to learn the Bible. In fact, we have a history of calling what I'm doing right now “teaching.” I'm teaching the Bible. What's the goal of teaching? Isn't it so that you might learn? If I'm teaching the Bible, then you're hoping to learn the Bible. But I don't think that's God's goal for His Word, which is why I'd prefer to call what I'm doing “preaching.” What I'm doing here, right now, however clumsily, is proclaiming the Word of God. Not so that you might learn the Bible, but so that through this written Word you might encounter the living Word. So that you might turn to God; not just learn the Bible, but turn to God.

So what is it that you expect out of this book? It's a divine book. It's a human book. It's a relational book. Will you hear it? Will you turn to God?

## God reacts

Well, the king didn't turn. He burned the scroll, but that's not the whole story. God started the conversation by speaking. Jehoiakim tried to shut Him up, but God ultimately had the last word. Listen to how the story concludes.

Jeremiah 36:27-32

**After the king burned the scroll containing the words that Baruch had written at Jeremiah's dictation, 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. Also tell Jehoiakim king of Judah, ‘This is what the LORD says: You burned that scroll and said, “Why did you write on it that the king of Babylon would certainly come and destroy this land and cut off both men and animals from it?” Therefore, 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.’” So Jeremiah took another scroll and gave it to the scribe Baruch son of Neriah, and as Jeremiah dictated, Baruch wrote on it all the words of the scroll that Jehoiakim king of Judah had burned in the fire. And many similar words were added to them.**

The first thing I love about this part of the story is that God doesn't panic. He doesn't react to the situation. In the first part of this passage,

we heard what God's desire was for this message. He wanted His people to turn back to Him. He wanted His lover back, but instead of coming back to Him, she spurned Him. She tore up His love letter and threw it into the fire. If this happened to me, I'd be furious. I'd panic. I'd lash out. But God doesn't do that. He responds to the situation, to be sure, but he doesn't react.

So how does He respond? Well, the same way He started. He gives Jeremiah a message and tells him simply, "take another scroll." The Word of God was destroyed, but the Word of God will be rewritten. And not just rewritten the same as before, but with more detail. The text says that all the same words were written with "many similar words." Those similar ones were the ones that told about what an idiot Jehoiakim had been and what the consequences for burning up the scroll would be. So now we see something else that's special about this book we've been given. The Bible can't be destroyed.

Jehoiakim tries to burn up this scroll, but it turns out that God's Word survives anyway. This isn't the only place that we hear about flames that can't consume their fuel. Think about God appearing to Moses in a bush that burned with fire, but wasn't burned up. Think about Daniel's three friends thrown into a fiery furnace, but emerging without even the smell of smoke on them. God's will can't be thwarted.

We have some plastic glasses in our house called Tervis Tumblers. They are double-walled plastic cups and they claim to be indestructible. Now, why would anyone make a product and claim that it is indestructible? Isn't that just asking for trouble? In fact, I know a bunch of college students who would love to prove that claim to be false. I'm pretty sure they can find a way to destroy these cups.

But the Word of God is different. Jehoiakim burns the scroll and it comes back stronger than ever. He gets judged in the process, but the Word of God prevails. This is why Isaiah 55:11 says: "So is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it."

Ultimately, God's purposes are going to be served. He won't be defeated. So for us and the individual commands we receive, what is at stake is not God's plan. If anyone ever tells you that your disobedience could thwart God's plans, they are using false manipulation because that is completely unscriptural. God's plan is not at stake. What's at stake is our participation in it. This book can't be destroyed and it will succeed. The Bible will prevail.

So God's Word can't be destroyed and it will succeed in its purposes. Well, that's interesting. Why did God write this Word? So His people might hear Him, turn to Him, and He might forgive them. Maybe this book tells us of a forgiveness that can't be stopped. Maybe the God that is revealed here reveals to us that He forgives us and we can't do anything to take away that forgiveness. If the success of God's Word depends on Him, not on our reaction to it, then maybe we can have confidence that God will offer His people forgiveness.

What we know is that this is exactly what the Bible reveals about our God; that He forgives us. Jehoiakim was judged because He didn't turn to God. The truth is that we don't respond to God's Word in the way that He wants us to. God spends His judgment on His Son so we can receive His forgiveness. We have God's Word here. He has spoken. We

can hear Him. We can turn to Him and we can receive His forgiveness. Will you receive God's forgiveness?

We decide our response to God. We decide how we respond to His Word. But we don't change His response to us because He is here to forgive. Are we ready to receive it?

So what we've seen about this book is pretty remarkable. The Bible is a divine book. It reveals God to us. It's a human book. It's delivered to us through the efforts and personalities of people. It is a relational book; it invites us to respond in relationship to God. But how are we supposed to relate to God? We don't deserve that. We can't turn to God. We're terrified of Him. We don't belong with Him unless He forgives.

A few days ago we went as a family to see *How to Train Your Dragon*, and really enjoyed it. This movie features a young Viking boy whose whole culture is bent on killing dragons. He ends up befriendng a dragon. Slowly, step by step, he earns the dragon's trust. So gradually instead of spitting fire, the dragon licks his face.

This is how God is with us. He is slowly winning us over, being patient with us when we spit fire at Him, and run away in fear. If we will allow it, we can gradually accept Him moving closer to us. We can receive His initiation and realize that His arms are extended not in judgment, but in forgiveness. We can turn to Him because He forgives. Apart from His love and forgiveness we'd be right to run, but when we are able to receive His forgiveness, then we can start to turn toward Him. We realize why this book is so special. It allows us to come back to the God who created us. It allows us to return to the Father that we once rejected. It restores us to the One who loves us. It is an invitation into the arms of the Father that we always wanted. This book is special because through it, we meet God.

## Conclusion

The "bad guy" in *The Book of Eli* wants the last copy on earth of the Bible because he says that it is powerful. He wants that power and he's right, this book is powerful, but not in the way that he thinks. This book is powerful, not because it tells us the right way to live. It's not powerful because it contains the most profitable moral code. It's not even powerful because it tells us about Christianity.

This book is powerful because it is how we meet God. This is a letter from God to us and we've seen that clearly in this passage in Jeremiah. God is writing a message to His people hoping that they might respond to Him or come back to Him. But they don't. Jehoiakim rejects God, burns the scroll, and is judged, but God's Word is rewritten and the original purpose is still there.

God speaks. We hear Him in this book. We turn toward Him in this book and we receive His forgiveness. That's what makes this book so special.