

SUNDAY SCHOOL NOTES: 15 September 2019: The scroll destroyed!

It is winter and the weather is cold. The king of Judah (Jehoiakim) and advisors have gathered in a room in the palace where a brazier has been lit. It is a scary time – the enemy troops are coming nearer and nearer to Jerusalem – but Jehoiakim seems confident that he is powerful enough to deal with the threat. Suddenly the door opens and a group of the king's officials appear.

They explain that there is a message from Jeremiah. I imagine the king rolling his eyes; this prophet is a nuisance. "Jeremiah has been forbidden to speak in the temple," the king roars. "Has he been disobeying me?"

"No, sir, but his companion, Baruch, wrote down his message and came to deliver it on his behalf. He read it aloud in the temple and when we heard about it we asked him to read it to us too."

"And what does this message say?" asks the king. "No, don't just tell me. Read it to me."

The men shuffle. They had deliberately left the scroll in the secretary's office because they knew the king might be difficult. However, one of them goes to fetch it. Then he starts to read the scroll to the king and his advisors.

The message is clear, repeating what Jeremiah has been saying over and over again: If the people go on sinning, God will punish them. But if they repent and admit that they have not honoured God, then he will forgive them lovingly and will rescue them from their enemies.

The king rolls his eyes again as the first section of the scroll is read. Suddenly he grabs the right-hand edge of the scroll and cuts off a segment of the parchment/ papyrus with a knife. He throws it into the fire. There – that shows what he thinks of this silly message. Although his officials are shocked, his advisors giggle – and so the king is encouraged to be even more dramatic. Each time he waits till the reader finishes the column, then he grabs the scroll and burns that section of it. His officials beg him to stop, but Jehoiakim enjoys what he is doing. This will show everyone what he thinks of Jeremiah and his silly God! He didn't even stop to think that this is God's message which he is destroying.

Eventually the entire scroll is in ashes. The king then instructs his men to arrest Jeremiah and Baruch, the scribe. But this didn't happen because the two had gone into hiding. God protected them and they were not found.

And what will happen next? Well, the people won't repent and so the enemy will come. Jehoiakim will be captured and killed – his body won't even be buried; it will just be left to rot! He showed no respect for God and no enemy will show respect for him. Many people will be taken captive and will be marched away as captives to Babylon.

Jeremiah and Baruch will not be taken captive. They will set about the task of rewriting God's message, adding in all kinds of extra details. This time the scroll will survive and it is

included as the chapters of the book of *Jeremiah* in our Bible. God's word cannot be destroyed.

People can joke about God; they can laugh about coming to Sunday School; they can ignore the Bible. But God is always there – they can't destroy him! And his promises remain true.