

ANGRY PENMAN MIGHTIER THAN ROYAL PENKNIFE

Want to get a preacher mad? Try ripping up his sermon. They tried that with Jeremiah, and it worked. The old prophet was so steamed he never said another nice thing about his people.

You can read all about it in the Jewish scriptures at Jeremiah 36. Obviously things were coming to a head. For over twenty years Jeremiah had been hounding the citizens of Jerusalem. A sermon here, an oracle there, a few debates in the temple precincts--but by and large nobody had paid attention.

So the prophet tried another tactic. He hired a secretary, a fellow named Baruch, and dictated his memoirs. Perhaps a book-length collection of his warnings would have greater impact.

After five months of writing, the scroll was ready. Jeremiah had been barred from the temple yards, where he could have had his best audience. So he sent his secretary in his place.

On a fast day, when the worshipers were in a relatively sober mood, Baruch gathered a few people and began to read. They were impressed. Jeremiah's scroll was so popular one of the court officials made a point to take notes.

He hightailed it to the palace and reported the matter to some other bigwigs. They in turn called Baruch so he could read the scrolls in their office. Jeremiah's warnings were so pointed and compelling they felt his book should be read to the king.

Apparently they suspected the king would not be pleased, so they told Baruch and Jeremiah to hide.

They were right. The king didn't like the idea at all. He had a member of the royal family read Jeremiah's scroll column by column. After every few paragraphs the king would slice off the end of the scroll and toss it into his space heater.

Some of the bureaucrats protested, but it didn't do any good. After an hour or so the entire scroll had been snipped up and turned into ashes in the king's charcoal brazier.

Then he issued an arrest warrant, but by that time Jeremiah and Baruch had gone underground.

They didn't give up. The prophet bought another ream of paper (OK, actually another scroll) and his secretary started writing again. The second edition was even longer and angrier than the first.

When all was said and done, the prophet won. He was so PO'ed by the king's arrogant reaction to his warnings that he never had another good word to say to the royal house again.

He predicted that the king would lose his throne, that their enemies would reduce Jerusalem to a pile of rubble, and that the citizens would be carted off into exile.

He was right on all counts. But that takes us beyond chapter 36. The point of this nasty turn of events is to show that the pen is mightier than the penknife.

Jeremiah was convinced he had a word from the Lord which had to be heard. And nothing could stop it. Apparently he was right. Nobody remembers much of anything about the king. But a lot of folks still read around in Jeremiah's writings.

It also goes to show how angry a preacher can get if you chop up his sermon!

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