Small Group Guide

Jeremiah Sermon Series -- Week 9

"The Word They Could Not Burn"

Jeremiah 34-36

Before You Meet

Encourage group members to read Jeremiah 34-36 before gathering. Ask them to come prepared to share one thing that stood out to them from the passage or the sermon.

Opening Question

Go around the room and answer this question before diving into the text:

Have you ever made a promise to God in the middle of a difficult season? What happened when the pressure lifted?

Key Takeaways

Use these summary points to ground the group before discussion begins.

1. Covenant-breaking reveals the limits of human religion.

Judah's last-minute obedience in freeing their slaves looked like genuine repentance, but it collapsed the moment the external pressure eased. Desperation-driven obedience is real, but it is fragile. The test of faithfulness is not how we pray in the crisis -- it is how we live when the crisis passes.

2. The Rechabites show that faithful obedience is possible.

For roughly two hundred and fifty years, the Rechabites kept their ancestor's instructions without exception -- under displacement, under pressure, inside the very temple of Judah. Their example is not a call to legalism but a call to the kind of deep, inherited, character-rooted loyalty that God honors.

3. You cannot destroy the word of God by destroying a copy of it.

King Jehoiakim cut the scroll apart and burned it column by column. God told Jeremiah to write it again -- and more was added. Every attempt to silence or erase God's word has failed. The word outlives every fire.

4. The gospel is embedded in all three stories.

Judah cut a covenant and broke it. Christ cut a new covenant in His blood and kept it perfectly. The covenant curse that Judah brought on itself fell instead on Jesus. The freedom He gives is not the revoked, conditional freedom of chapter 34 -- it is the funded, permanent freedom of the cross.

Discussion Questions

Story One: A Covenant Made and Broken (Jeremiah 34)

1. The sermon described the ancient covenant-cutting ritual -- the animals split in half, the parties walking between the pieces, the implicit declaration: "May this happen to me if I break this covenant." How does understanding that ritual change the way you read verse 11, when the people take their slaves back?

2. The sermon made this observation: "Desperation-driven obedience is real, but it is fragile. If we only obey God when the walls are coming down, our obedience will last exactly as long as the siege." Where in your own life have you seen this pattern play out -- either in yourself or in others?

3. The law in Deuteronomy 15 did not just command the release of slaves -- it commanded a generous send-off, funded freedom. The sermon connected this to 1 Peter 1:18-19, where Christ ransoms us not with silver or gold but with His own blood, sending us out rich. How does this picture of "funded freedom" change the way you think about what salvation actually provides?

4. In verse 17, God takes the people's promise and returns it to them as a curse: because they did not proclaim liberty to their neighbors, He proclaims liberty to the sword, pestilence, and famine. What does this tell us about how seriously God takes the promises we make to Him?

Story Two: A Family That Keeps Its Word (Jeremiah 35)

5. The Rechabites were tested in the most difficult possible setting -- inside the temple, with cups of wine set right in front of them, surrounded by the religious establishment of Judah. And they still refused. The sermon said: "Circumstances are never the reason we break our word. Character is." Do you agree? What does it take to build that kind of character?

6. The sermon asked: "Is the sacrifice to stand against a corrupted culture worth it?" The Rechabites received this promise in verse 19: "Jonadab the son of Rechab shall never lack a man to stand before me." How does that promise speak to you personally when faithfulness feels costly?

7. The sermon raised the question of inherited faith: "Are we committed to live our lives and raise our children in such a way that future generations will still be faithful in two hundred and fifty years?" What does that kind of multigenerational faithfulness look like practically in your family or your church?

8. The sermon drew a contrast between the Rechabites' loyalty to a human father's word and Judah's disloyalty to God's word. If a family can sustain obedience to a human instruction for two and a half centuries, what does our inconsistency with God's word say about what we actually believe about Him?

Story Three: A Scroll Burned and Rewritten (Jeremiah 36)

9. The officials who heard Baruch read the scroll "turned one to another in fear" (verse 16) -- but fear did not produce repentance. The sermon said: "Being moved is not the same as being changed." Have you ever been genuinely moved by God's word without actually changing? What was the difference in the moments when the word did produce change in you?

10. King Jehoiakim sat in his warm winter house and cut the scroll apart column by column, feeding it into the fire. The sermon applied this image directly: "Like Zedekiah in his winter palace, the modern church is warming itself by the fire of cultural approval, and the word of God is being fed into the flames one page, one passage at a time." Where do you see this happening? How do we guard against it in our own lives and in our church?

11. God's stated purpose for sending the scroll was mercy: "It 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" (verse 3). How does knowing that God's hard words come from a heart of mercy change the way you receive difficult passages of Scripture?

12. The sermon ended with the gospel: the Word became flesh, was taken outside the city, crucified -- and rose. The fire of judgment fell on the Word made flesh, and the word still could not be destroyed. How does the resurrection of Jesus give you confidence in the permanence and authority of Scripture?

Connecting the Three Stories

13. The sermon described these three chapters as "the closing arguments in God's case -- the proof that human religion, even at its most sincere, cannot save." Looking at all three stories together -- the covenant-breakers, the covenant-keepers, and the burned scroll -- what does the combination of these three accounts tell us about why we need a Savior rather than simply better intentions?

Practical Applications

Choose one or more of the following to discuss as a group and commit to individually before your next meeting.

Revisit a vow.

The sermon's Life Change Challenge was direct: write down one promise you made to God in a hard season that you stopped keeping. Identify one concrete step you can take this week to restore it. Share that commitment with a trusted person in your group who will follow up with you.

Examine your relationship with Scripture.

Spend time this week identifying one passage or teaching of Scripture that you have been quietly setting aside -- softening, reinterpreting, or avoiding -- because it is uncomfortable or culturally unpopular. Bring it back to the text. Ask God for the courage to submit to what He actually said.

Invest in the next generation.

The Rechabites passed their convictions down for two hundred and fifty years. Identify one person -- a child, a teenager, a younger believer -- with whom you can intentionally share what it looks like to remain faithful to God's word when the culture pushes back. Make a specific plan to have that conversation this week.

Receive the funded freedom of the gospel.

If you have been living as though your freedom in Christ is conditional -- as though God might revoke it the next time you fail -- spend time this week meditating on what it means that Christ kept the covenant you broke and bore the curse in your place. Ask Him to make that truth feel as real as the pressure you are currently under.

Closing Prayer

Close your time together by praying through the themes of the sermon. You may use the closing prayer from the sermon as a guide, or pray in your own words, covering these three areas:

- Confession of the ways we have made and broken promises to God

- Gratitude for Christ, who kept the covenant we shattered and bore the fire we deserved

- A request for the kind of deep, character-rooted faithfulness that holds under pressure and passes to the next generation

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For Further Reflection During the Week

- Read Genesis 15 and reflect on what it means that God alone passed between the pieces while Abram slept.

- Read Deuteronomy 15:12-15 and consider what "funded freedom" looked like under the Mosaic covenant, and how it points forward to the cross.

- Read John 1:1-14 alongside Jeremiah 36 and reflect on what happened when the living Word came and was rejected -- and what it means that He rose.