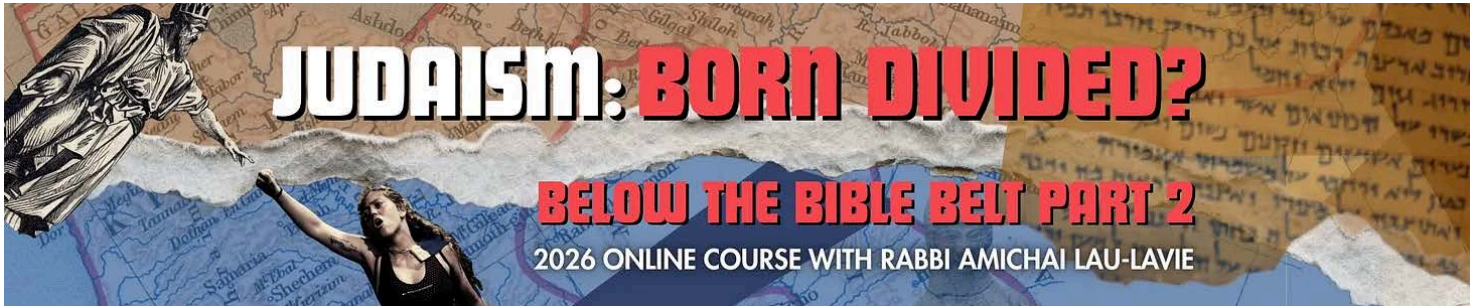




Book Burning: When Scripture Starts a Civil War June 14, 2026

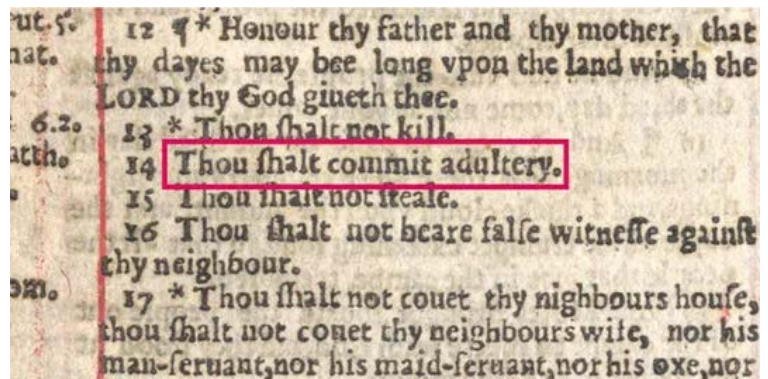
SOURCE 1

“That was but a prelude; where they burn books, they will ultimately burn people as well.”

Heinrich Heine, *Almansor* (1821)

“Book burnings. Always the forerunners. Heralds of the stake, the ovens, the mass graves.”

Geraldine Brooks, *People of the Book* (2008)



“There is more than one way to burn a book. And the world is full of people running about with lit matches... Every minority feels it has the right to censor what it dislikes.”

Ray Bradbury, *Fahrenheit 451* (afterword, 1979)

Image: The Sinner's Bible, 1631 Almost all copies of this King James Bible edition were burned and the printers fined for omitting the word 'Not' from the Seventh Commandment.

SOURCE 2

"Book-burning has been used to suppress dissent and protect totalitarian regimes throughout history. From the early thirteenth century when Pope Gregory IX directed King Louis IX of France to burn every copy of the Talmud in Paris to the mid twentieth century when Stalin burned the entire Judaica collection in the capital of the Jewish Oblast of Russia, Jewish texts have been prime targets.

Unfortunately, Jews themselves have not been guiltless of this crime. Maimonides' Guide to the Perplexed was deemed heretical by some Jewish factions and burned in France in 1233. In 1954 The Union of Orthodox Rabbis of the United States and Canada burned the books of Mordecai Kaplan, co-founder of the Reconstructionist Movement, at a public event in New York City. The first recorded instance of Jewish book-burning occurs in Jeremiah 36."

[Molly Morris, The First Jewish Book Burning](#)

SOURCE 3

וַיִּקְרָא בְרוּךְ בַּסֵּפֶר אֶת־דְּבָרֵי יִרְמְיָהוּ בֵּית יְהוָה בְּלִשְׁלֹת גְּמָרְיָהוּ
בֶן־שָׁפָן הַסֹּפֵר בְּחֹצֵר הָעֲלִיּוֹן פָּתַח שַׁעַר בֵּית־יְהוָה הַחֲדָשׁ בְּאַזְגֵי
כָּל־הָעָם:

וַיִּשְׁמַע מִלִּיָּהוּ בֶן־גְּמָרְיָהוּ בֶן־שָׁפָן אֶת־כָּל־דְּבָרֵי יְהוָה מֵעַל הַסֵּפֶר:

וַיֵּרֶד בֵּית־הַמֶּלֶךְ עַל־לִשְׁכַּת הַסֵּפֶר וְהִנֵּה־שָׁם כָּל־הַשָּׂרִים יוֹשְׁבִים
אֵלֵי־שִׁמְעַת הַסֵּפֶר וְדַלְיָהוּ בֶן־שָׁמְעִיָּהוּ וְאַלְנָתָן בֶּן־עֲכָבוֹר וְגְמָרְיָהוּ בֶן־שָׁפָן
וְצִדְקִיָּהוּ בֶן־חֲנַנְיָהוּ וְכָל־הַשָּׂרִים:

וַיַּגֵּד לָהֶם מִלִּיָּהוּ אֶת כָּל־הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר שָׁמַע בִּקְרֹא בְרוּךְ בַּסֵּפֶר בְּאַזְגֵי
הָעָם:

וַיִּשְׁלְחוּ כָּל־הַשָּׂרִים אֶל־בְּרוּךְ אֶת־יְהוֹדִי בֶן־נְתַנְיָהוּ בֶן־שְׁלֹמֹהיָהוּ בֶן־כּוֹשִׁיָּהוּ
לֵאמֹר הַמְּגִלָּה אֲשֶׁר קָרָאתָ בָּהּ בְּאַזְגֵי הָעָם קָחָהּ בְּיָדְךָ וְלֵךְ וְלִקַּח בְּרוּךְ
בֶּן־נְרִיָּהוּ אֶת־הַמְּגִלָּה בְּיָדוֹ וַיָּבֵא אֵלֵיהֶם:

וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלָיו שֶׁב נָא וְקִרְאָנָהּ בְּאַזְגֵינוּ וַיִּקְרָא בְרוּךְ בְּאַזְגֵיהֶם:

וַיְהִי כִשְׁמַעֲמָם אֶת־כָּל־הַדְּבָרִים פָּחְדוּ אִישׁ אֶל־רֵעֵהוּ וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֶל־בְּרוּךְ
הַגִּיד נָגִיד לְמֶלֶךְ אֶת כָּל־הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה:

וְאֶת־בְּרוּךְ שָׁאֵלוּ לֵאמֹר הֲגֵד־נָא לָנוּ אִיךָ כָּתַבְתָּ אֶת־כָּל־הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה
מִפִּי:

וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם בְּרוּךְ מִפִּי יִקְרָא אֵלַי אֶת כָּל־הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה וְאֲנִי כָתַב
עַל־הַסֵּפֶר בְּדַוּי: {ס}

וַיְהִי בַשָּׁנָה הָרְבִּיעִית לַיהוֹנָתָן בֶּן־יֹאשִׁיָּהוּ מֶלֶךְ יְהוּדָה הָיָה הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה
אֶל־יִרְמְיָהוּ מֵאֵת יְהוָה לֵאמֹר:

קַח־לְךָ מְגִלַּת־סֵפֶר וְכַתַּבְתָּ אֵלֶיהָ אֶת כָּל־הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר־דִּבַּרְתִּי אֵלֶיךָ
עַל־יִשְׂרָאֵל וְעַל־יְהוּדָה וְעַל־כָּל־הַגּוֹיִם מִיּוֹם דִּבַּרְתִּי אֵלֶיךָ מִיְּמֵי יֹאשִׁיָּהוּ
וְעַד הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה:

אֲנִי יִשְׁמְעוּ בֵּית יְהוּדָה אֶת כָּל־הַרְעָה אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי חֹשֵׁב לַעֲשׂוֹת לָהֶם
לְמַעַן יָשׁוּבוּ אִישׁ מִדְּרָכּוֹ הַרְעָה וְסִלַּחְתִּי לַעֲוֹנָם וְלַחֲטָאתָם:

וַיִּקְרָא יִרְמְיָהוּ אֶת־בְּרוּךְ בֶּן־נְרִיָּהוּ וַיַּכְתֵּב בְּרוּךְ מִפִּי יִרְמְיָהוּ אֶת
כָּל־דְּבָרֵי יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר־דִּבַּר אֵלָיו עַל־מְגִלַּת־סֵפֶר:

וַיֵּצֵא יִרְמְיָהוּ אֶת־בְּרוּךְ לֵאמֹר אֲנִי עֹצֹר לֹא אוֹכַל לָבוֹא בֵּית יְהוָה:

וּבָאת אַתָּה וְקִרְאתָ בַּמְּגִלָּה אֲשֶׁר־כָּתַבְתָּ מִפִּי אֶת־דְּבָרֵי יְהוָה בְּאַזְגֵי
הָעָם בֵּית יְהוָה בַּיּוֹם צֹם וְגַם בְּאַזְגֵי כָל־יְהוּדָה הַבָּאִים מִעָרֵיהֶם
תִּקְרְאוּם:

אֲנִי תִפְּל תַּחֲנֹתָם לִפְנֵי יְהוָה וַיָּשׁוּבוּ אִישׁ מִדְּרָכּוֹ הַרְעָה כִּי־גָדוֹל הָאֵף
וְהַחֲמָה אֲשֶׁר־דִּבַּר יְהוָה אֶל־הָעָם הַזֶּה:

וַיַּעַשׂ בְּרוּךְ בֶּן־נְרִיָּהוּ כְּכָל אֲשֶׁר־צִוָּהוּ יִרְמְיָהוּ הַנְּבִיא לִקְרֹא בַּסֵּפֶר דְּבָרֵי
יְהוָה בֵּית יְהוָה: {פ}

וַיְהִי בַשָּׁנָה הָחֲמִישִׁית לַיהוֹנָתָן בֶּן־יֹאשִׁיָּהוּ מֶלֶךְ־יְהוּדָה בַּחֲדָשׁ הַתְּשַׁעִי
קָרְאוּ צוֹם לִפְנֵי יְהוָה כָּל־הָעָם בִּירוּשָׁלַם וְכָל־הָעָם הַבָּאִים מִעָרֵי יְהוּדָה
בִּירוּשָׁלַם:

וַיֹּאמְרוּ הַשָּׂרִים אֶל-בְּרוּךְ לַךְ הַסֵּתֶר אֲתָה וְיִרְמְיָהוּ וְאִישׁ אֲלִיָּדָע אִפְּיָה אֲתָם:

וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶל-הַמֶּלֶךְ חֲצֵרָה וְאֶת-הַמַּגְלָה הַפְּקֻדוֹ בְּלִשְׁכַּת אֲלִישֶׁמֶע הַסֹּפֵר וַיִּגִּידוּ בְּאָזְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶת כָּל-הַדְּבָרִים:

וַיִּשְׁלַח הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶת-יְהוּדִי לְקַחַת אֶת-הַמַּגְלָה וַיִּקְחָהּ מִלִּשְׁכַּת אֲלִישֶׁמֶע הַסֹּפֵר וַיִּקְרָאָהּ יְהוּדִי בְּאָזְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ וּבְאָזְנֵי כָל-הַשָּׂרִים הַעֹמְדִים מֵעַל הַמֶּלֶךְ:

וְהַמֶּלֶךְ יוֹשֵׁב בֵּית הַחֹרֶף בְּחֹדֶשׁ הַתְּשִׁיעִי וְאֶת-הָאֵחָד לִפְנֵי מִבְּעֵרָת:

וַיְהִי כִּקְרֹא יְהוּדִי שֵׁלֶשׁ דָּלֹתוֹת וְאַרְבָּעָה יְקֻרָּעָה בְּתֵעֵר הַסֹּפֵר וְהַשֵּׁלֶךְ אֶל-הָאִשׁ אֲשֶׁר אֶל-הָאֵחָד עַד-תֵּם כָּל-הַמַּגְלָה עַל-הָאִשׁ אֲשֶׁר עַל-הָאֵחָד:

וְלֹא פָחַדוּ וְלֹא קָרְעוּ אֶת-בְּגָדֵיהֶם הַמֶּלֶךְ וְכָל-עַבְדָּיו הַשָּׂמַעִים אֶת כָּל-הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה:

וְגַם אֶלְנָתָן וְדָלְיָהוּ וְגִמְרִיָּהוּ הִפְגִּעוּ בַּמֶּלֶךְ לְבַלְתִּי שָׂרֶף אֶת-הַמַּגְלָה וְלֹא שָׁמַע אֲלֵיהֶם:

וַיִּצְוֶה הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶת-יִרְחֻמְאֵל בֶּן-הַמֶּלֶךְ וְאֶת-שָׂרְיָהוּ בֶן-עֲזַרְיָאֵל וְאֶת-שְׁלִמְיָהוּ בֶן-עֲבַדְיָאֵל לְקַחַת אֶת-בְּרוּךְ הַסֹּפֵר וְאֶת יִרְמְיָהוּ הַנָּבִיא וַיִּסְתֵּרֵם יְהוָה: {o}

וַיְהִי דְבַר-יְהוָה אֶל-יִרְמְיָהוּ אַחֲרֵי שֶׁרָף הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶת-הַמַּגְלָה וְאֶת-הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר כָּתַב בְּרוּךְ מִפִּי יִרְמְיָהוּ לֵאמֹר:

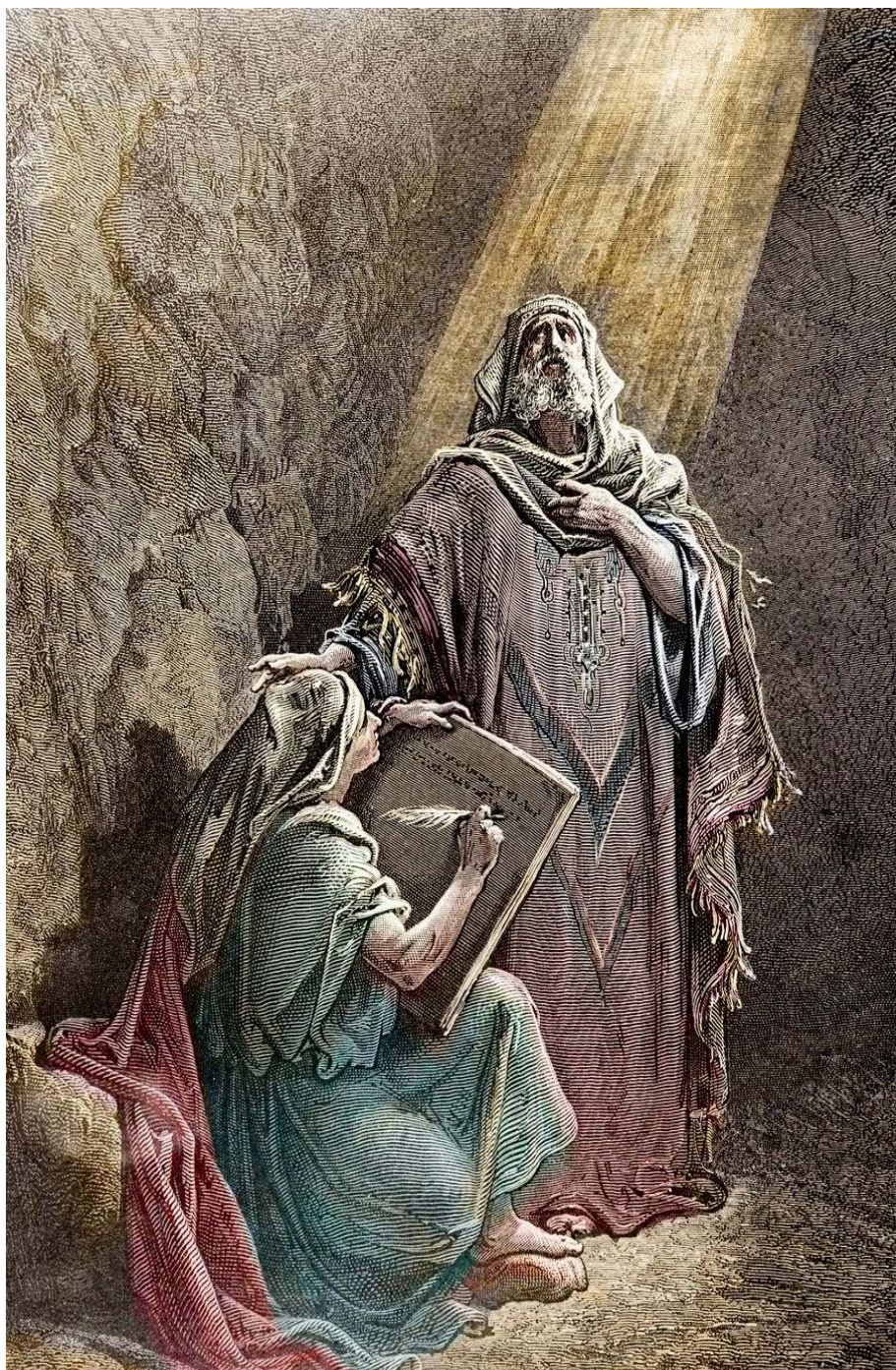
שׁוּב קַח-לְךָ מַגְלָה אַחֲרֵת וְכָתַב עָלֶיהָ אֶת כָּל-הַדְּבָרִים הָרִאשׁוֹנִים אֲשֶׁר הָיוּ עַל-הַמַּגְלָה הָרִאשׁוֹנָה אֲשֶׁר שָׂרָף יְהוֹנָקִים מֶלֶךְ-יְהוּדָה:

וְעַל-יְהוֹנָקִים מֶלֶךְ-יְהוּדָה תֹּאמַר כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי שְׂרָפָת אֶת-הַמַּגְלָה הַזֹּאת לֵאמֹר מִדּוֹעַ כָּתַבְתָּ עָלֶיהָ לֵאמֹר בֹּא-יָבֹא מֶלֶךְ-בָּבֶל וְהַשְׁחִית אֶת-הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת וְהַשְׁבִּית מִמֶּנָּה אָדָם וּבְהֵמָה: {o}

לָכֵן כֹּה-אָמַר יְהוָה עַל-יְהוֹנָקִים מֶלֶךְ יְהוּדָה לֹא-יְהִי־לּוֹ יוֹשֵׁב עַל-כִּסֵּא דָוִד וְנִבְלָתוֹ תִּהְיֶה מִשְׁלָכֶת לַחֲרָב בַּיּוֹם וְלִקְרַח בְּלִילָה:

וּפְקֻדָּתִי עָלָיו וְעַל-זֶרְעוֹ וְעַל-עַבְדָּיו אֶת-עֹנֶם וְהַבָּאתִי עָלֵיהֶם וְעַל-יִשְׁבִּי יְרוּשָׁלַם וְאֶל-אִישׁ יְהוּדָה אֶת כָּל-הָרָעָה אֲשֶׁר-דִּבַּרְתִּי אֲלֵיהֶם וְלֹא שָׁמְעוּ:

וַיִּרְמְיָהוּ לָקַח מַגְלָה אַחֲרֵת וַיִּתְּנָהּ אֶל-בְּרוּךְ בֶּן-נְרִיָּהוּ הַסֹּפֵר וַיִּכְתֹּב עָלֶיהָ מִפִּי יִרְמְיָהוּ אֶת כָּל-דְּבָרֵי הַסֹּפֵר אֲשֶׁר שָׂרָף יְהוֹנָקִים מֶלֶךְ-יְהוּדָה בָּאִשׁ וְעוֹד נֹסֵף עָלֵיהֶם דְּבָרִים רַבִּים כִּהְמָה: {פ}



In the fourth year of King Jehoiakim son of Josiah of Judah, this word came to Jeremiah from GOD:

Get a scroll and write upon it all the words that I have spoken to you—concerning Israel and Judah and all the nations—from the time I first spoke to you in the days of Josiah to this day.

Perhaps when the House of Judah hear of all the disasters I intend to bring upon them, they will turn back from their wicked ways, and I will pardon their iniquity and their sin.

So Jeremiah called Baruch son of Neriah; and Baruch wrote down in the scroll, at Jeremiah's dictation, all the words that GOD had spoken to him.

Jeremiah instructed Baruch, "I am in hiding; I cannot go to the House of GOD.

But you go and read aloud GOD's words from the scroll that you wrote at my dictation, to all the people in the House of GOD on a fast day; thus you will also be reading them to all the Judeans who come in from the towns.

Perhaps their entreaty will be accepted by GOD, if they turn back from their wicked ways. For great is the anger and wrath with which GOD has threatened this people."

Baruch son of Neriah did just as the prophet Jeremiah had instructed him, about reading GOD's words from the scroll in the House of GOD.

In the ninth month of the fifth year of King Jehoiakim son of Josiah of Judah, all the people in Jerusalem and all the people coming from Judah proclaimed a fast before GOD in Jerusalem.

It was then that Baruch—in the chamber of Gemariah son of Shaphan the scribe, in the upper court, near the new gateway of the House of GOD—read the words of Jeremiah from the scroll to all the people in the House of GOD.

Micaiah son of Gemariah son of Shaphan heard all the words of GOD [read] from the scroll,

and he went down to the king's palace, to the chamber of the scribe. There he found all the officials in session: Elishama the scribe, Delaiah son of Shemaiah, Elnathan son of Achbor, Gemariah son of Shaphan, Zedekiah son of Hananiah, and all the other officials.

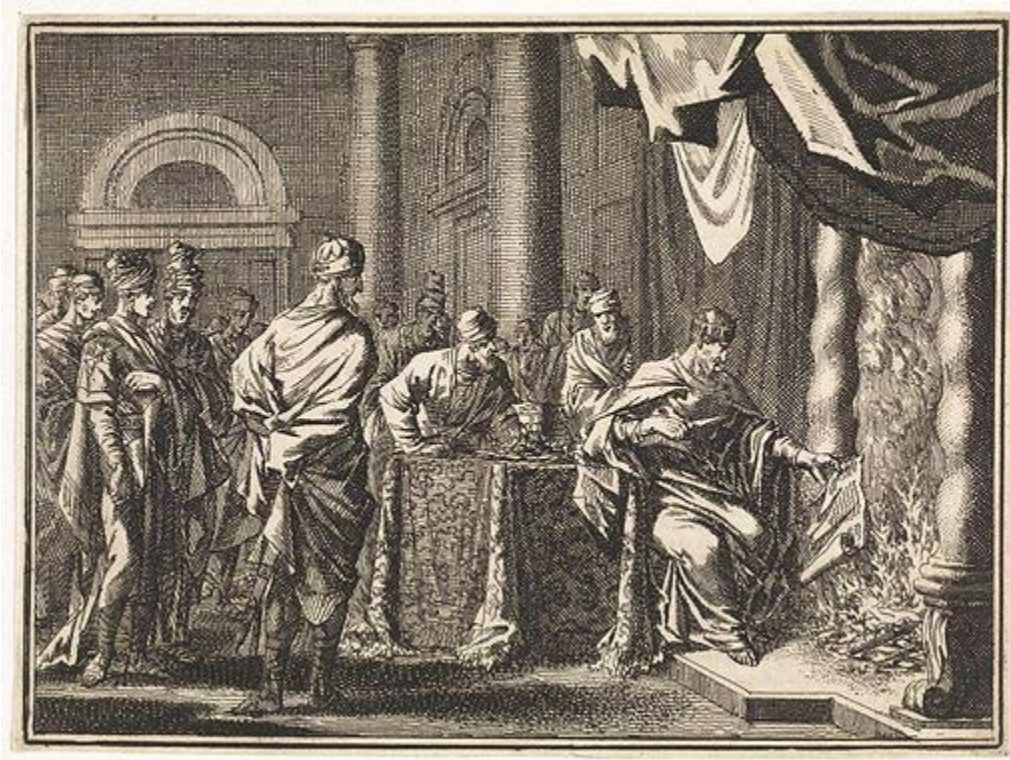
And Micaiah told them all that he had heard as Baruch read from the scroll in the hearing of the people.

Then all the officials sent Jehudi son of Nethaniah son of Shelemiah son of Cushi to say to Baruch, "Take that scroll from which you read to the people, and come along!" And Baruch took the scroll and came to them.

They said, "Sit down and read it to us." And Baruch read it to them.

When they heard all these words, they turned to each other in fear; and they said to Baruch, "We must report all this to the king."

And they questioned Baruch further, "Tell us how you wrote down all these words that he spoke."



He answered them, "He himself recited all those words to me, and I would write them down in the scroll in ink."

The officials said to Baruch, "Go into hiding, you and Jeremiah. Don't let anyone know where you are!"

And they went to the king in the court, after leaving the scroll in the chamber of the scribe Elishama. And they reported all these matters to the king.

The king sent Jehudi to get the scroll and he fetched it

from the chamber of the scribe Elishama. Jehudi read it to the king and to all the officials who were in attendance.

Since it was the ninth month, the king was sitting in the winter house, with a fire burning in the brazier before him.

And every time Jehudi read three or four columns, [the king] would cut it up with a scribe's knife and throw it into the fire in the brazier, until the entire scroll was consumed by the fire in the brazier.

Yet the king and all his courtiers who heard all these words showed no fear and did not tear their garments;

moreover, Elnathan, Delaiah, and Gemariah begged the king not to burn the scroll, but he would not listen to them.

The king ordered Jerahmeel, the king's son, and Seraiah son of Azriel, and Shelemiah son of Abdeel to arrest the scribe Baruch and the prophet Jeremiah. But GOD hid them.

The word of GOD came to Jeremiah after the king had burned the scroll containing the words that Baruch had written at Jeremiah's dictation:

Get yourself another scroll, and write upon it the same words that were in the first scroll that was burned by King Jehoiakim of Judah.

And concerning King Jehoiakim of Judah you shall say: Thus said GOD: You burned that scroll, saying, “How dare you write in it that the king of Babylon will come and destroy this land and cause human and animal to cease from it?”

Assuredly, thus said GOD concerning King Jehoiakim of Judah: He shall not have any of his line sitting on the throne of David; and his own corpse shall be left exposed to the heat by day and the cold by night.

And I will punish him and his offspring and his courtiers for their iniquity; I will bring on them and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem and on all the citizenry of Judah all the disasters of which I have warned them—but they would not listen.

So Jeremiah got another scroll and gave it to the scribe Baruch son of Neriah. And at Jeremiah’s dictation, he wrote in it the whole text of the scroll that King Jehoiakim of Judah had burned; and more of the like was added.

Images: Gustav Dore, Jeremiah and Baruch, 1866; Jan Luyken, Jehoiakim burns the scroll with the prophecies of Jeremiah. Origin: Amsterdam. Date: 1712.

SOURCE 4

The Judean kingdom is in its final throes, and Jehoiakim is on the throne. His father, Josiah, is famous for finding a copy of the Torah and instituting religious reforms. In his son’s reign, however, Judah had become a vassal to Babylon, and now it was looking to Egypt for the right moment to break free. In doing so, the palace has to contend with major obstacles, and one of them is a prophet: Jeremiah. He is loudly protesting the state’s policies as they pertain to both international and internal relations. Our account begins with the scribe Baruch memorializing Jeremiah’s prophecies in a scroll. The prophet then instructs him to take the document and read it to the inhabitants of Judah. “It may be that they will present their supplication before Yhwh, and everyone will turn from his evil way. For great is the anger and fury that Yhwh has pronounced against this people” (Jeremiah 36:7).

Concerned to make the scroll available to as many as possible, Baruch goes to the temple when the inhabitants of Judah’s cities were coming to Jerusalem for a public fast day. After he reads the scroll in public, a smaller circle of scribes and officials instructs Baruch and Jeremiah to lie low and hide the scroll. It is wintertime, and when members of the royal cabinet bring the scroll to the court, the king is sitting before a fire and has his scribe read it to him and the princes who were present. As they proceed, he uses a scribe’s scalpel to slice off columns, casting them piece by piece in the flames. When they had read and burned the entire document, Jehoiakim orders his men to arrest Jeremiah and Baruch.

It would be difficult to imagine a more graphic illustration of state censorship. On the eve of destruction, a monarch warms himself by burning a book – not because he lacks fuel for his fire, but because its contents challenge his rule and political agenda. The only reason we still have Jeremiah's prophecies, this legend claims, is because Jeremiah and Baruch were in hiding and able to produce a new scroll, which they concealed from the court.

Knowledge is power, and throughout history rulers have gone to great lengths to control the flow of information. Sociologists and historians study this phenomenon under the rubric of Wissensmonopol, a German term that means "monopoly of knowledge." Modern democratic societies recognize the importance of transparency, freedom of information, and open access. Likewise, the scribes who shaped the biblical corpus knew how crucial it was to check the power of the crown and communal authorities. In the present chapter we consider how they applied the principle of transparency to the knowledge that was the special preserve of palace, prophet, and priest.

Who Wrote the Bible? That is the question taken on in the best-selling book bearing this title. Its author, Richard Elliott Friedman, argues that the most extensive source in the biblical narrative was written either by the prophet Jeremiah or his scribal secretary, Baruch ben Neriah, or both working in tandem.

But as we have seen and will continue to see, the Bible betrays very different views of the nation's history, and many writers had a hand in the composition of this work. Some of the scribes may be mentioned among the host of names found in the book of Jeremiah...But for all practical intents and purposes, the biblical authors are anonymous. Even in the case of Baruch, we cannot say much about his life, social location, or political agenda.

...The anonymity of the biblical writings stands in stark contrast to the single-authored works of Greece, such as the histories of Herodotus and Thucydides. The authors of the National Narrative intentionally concealed their identity in an effort to focus their audience's attention on the representative figures they portrayed in their account – figures such as Abraham and Sarah, Joshua and Rahab, Josiah and Huldah.

The Bible is nothing if not a revisionary work.

It grew as multiple textual memories were compiled. Later it was redacted from new perspectives, and thereafter the process continued in the form of commentary and retelling

SOURCE 5

בן־שְׁמֹנֶה שָׁנָה יָאֲשִׁיחוּ בְּמִלְכּוֹ וַיְשָׁלֶשִׁים וְאַחַת שָׁנָה מֶלֶךְ בִּירוּשָׁלַם וְשֵׁם אִמּוֹ יְדִידָה בַת־עֲדָיָה מִבְּצֻקָּת:

Josiah was eight years old when he became king, and he reigned thirty-one years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jedidah daughter of Adaiah of Bozkath.

וַיַּעַשׂ הַיֶּשֶׁר בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה וַיִּלֶּךְ בְּכָל־דֶּרֶךְ דָּוִד אָבִיו וְלֹא־סָר יְמִין וּשְׂמָאוֹל:

He did what was pleasing to GOD and he followed all the ways of his forefather David; he did not deviate to the right or to the left.



וַיֹּאמֶר חִלְקִיָּהוּ הַכֹּהֵן הַגָּדוֹל עַל־שֹׁפָן הַסֹּפֵר סֵפֶר הַתּוֹרָה מֵצָאֵתִי בְּבֵית יְהוָה וַיִּתֵּן חִלְקִיָּהוּ אֶת־הַסֵּפֶר אֶל־שֹׁפָן וַיִּקְרָאָהוּ:

Then the high priest Hilkiah said to the scribe Shaphan, "I have found a scroll of the Teaching in the House of GOD." And Hilkiah gave the scroll to Shaphan, who read it.

וַיְהִי כַשְׁמַע הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶת־דְּבָרֵי סֵפֶר הַתּוֹרָה וַיִּקְרַע אֶת־בְּגָדָיו:

When the king heard the words of the scroll of the Teaching, he rent his clothes.

וַיַּעַל הַמֶּלֶךְ בֵּית־יְהוָה וְכָל־אִישׁ יְהוּדָה וְכָל־יִשְׂרָאֵל וְיִרוּשָׁלַם אֹתוֹ וְהַכֹּהֲנִים וְהַנְּבִיאִים וְכָל־הָעָם לְמַקְטָן וְעַד־גָּדוֹל וַיִּקְרָא בְּאָזְנֵיהֶם אֶת־כָּל־דְּבָרֵי סֵפֶר הַבְּרִית הַנִּמְצָא בְּבֵית יְהוָה:

The king went up to the House of GOD, together with the entire citizenry of Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and the priests and prophets—all the people, young and old. And he read to them the entire text of the covenant scroll that had been found in the House of GOD.

וַיַּעֲמֵד הַמֶּלֶךְ עַל־הָעַמּוּד וַיִּכְרַת אֶת־הַבְּרִית | לִפְנֵי יְהוָה לְלָקֵת אַחֵר יְהוָה וּלְשָׁמֹר מִצְוֹתָיו וְאֶת־עֲדוּתָיו וְאֶת־חֻקֵּיהֶם בְּכָל־לֵב וּבְכָל־נַפֶּשׁ לְהִקְיָם אֶת־דְּבָרֵי הַבְּרִית הַזֹּאת הַכְּתוּבִים עַל־הַסֵּפֶר הַזֶּה וַיַּעֲמֵד כָּל־הָעָם בְּבִרְיָת:

The king stood by the pillar and solemnized the covenant before GOD: that they would follow GOD and observe God's commandments, injunctions, and laws with all their heart and soul; that they would fulfill all the terms of this covenant as inscribed upon the scroll.

And all the people entered into the covenant.

וַיֵּצֵא הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶת־חִלְקִיָּהוּ הַכֹּהֵן הַגָּדוֹל וְאֶת־כֹּהֲנֵי הַמִּשְׁנָה וְאֶת־שֹׁמְרֵי הַסֶּף לְהוֹצִיא מֵהֵיכַל יְהוָה אֶת־כָּל־הַכֵּלִים הָעֲשׂוּיִם לַבַּעַל וְלָאֲשֵׁרָה וְלִכָּל צָבָא הַשָּׁמַיִם וְיִשְׂרָאֵל מִחוּץ לִירוּשָׁלַם בְּשָׂדֵמוֹת קִדְרוֹן וְנָשָׂא אֶת־עֲפָרָם בֵּית־אֵל:

Then the king ordered the high priest Hilkiah, the priests of the second rank, and the guards of the threshold to bring out of the Temple of GOD all the objects made for Baal and Asherah and all the host of heaven. He burned them outside Jerusalem in the fields of Kidron, and he removed the ashes to Bethel.

וְגַם אֶת־הַמִּזְבֵּחַ אֲשֶׁר בְּבֵית־אֵל הַבְּמֶה אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה יִרְבֵּעַם בֶּן־נֶבֶט אֲשֶׁר הִחֲטִיֵּא אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל גַּם אֶת־הַמִּזְבֵּחַ הַהוּא וְאֶת־הַבְּמֶה נָתַץ וַיִּשְׂרֹף אֶת־הַבְּמֶה הַדֶּק לְעָפָר וְשִׂרְף אֲשֵׁרָה:

As for the altar in Bethel [and] the shrine made by Jeroboam son of Nebat who caused Israel to sin—that altar, too, and the shrine as well, he tore down. He burned down the shrine and beat it to dust, and he burned the sacred post.

2 Kings 22

SOURCE 6

2 Kings 22-23 describe a series of radical reforms that King Josiah enacted during the latter part of the seventh century BCE. These reforms included the abolishment of all places of worship to foreign gods in the lands that Josiah controlled, the destruction of high places and altar sites to YHWH that were outside of Jerusalem, and, as a consequence, the demotion of the levitical priests.



2 Kings 22 tells us that Josiah executed these reforms as a result of the discovery of a scroll in the Temple, which indicated that sacrifices should be offered at only one central place. Most biblical scholars believe that this “discovered” scroll was an early form of what we now know as the fifth book of the Bible, Deuteronomy, because this book by and large advocates the same program that Josiah enacted.

There is no consensus regarding who wrote Deuteronomy, but there is general agreement that the program it advocates includes centralization of all worship in Jerusalem, support for the monarchy but with limited powers, a focus on Torah as the locus for the relationship between God and Israel, and a concept of a more transcendent God than is described elsewhere in Torah.

The authors of Deuteronomy placed their theological, social and political ideologies in the mouth of Moses to give legitimacy to their reforms. In this way, they were able to interact with the tradition as it stood in their time, to reinterpret earlier traditions, and to innovate while grounding the new in the old.

Prof. Tamar Kamionkowski

Image: Burning of books associated with 'witchcraft' in Mount Juliet, Tennessee (2 February 2022)

SOURCE 7

"The history of Israel and Judah is selectively retold... with deliberate omissions and additions reflecting a certain emphasis. While the northern kingdom is negatively portrayed, the southern kingdom is positively evaluated... The Jerusalem temple cult is legitimised and asserted as representing the only accurate religion... functioning in this community as a discourse of power."

Ananda Geyser-Fouche

SOURCE 8

"The book is as old as fire, as water. It is the memory of the desert where the word found its stone... You cannot burn the book, because the book is made of the very ash that remains after the fire."

Edmond Jabès, *The Book of Questions*, 1963

Next Session: JULY 19, 2026

