

# The Fiery Bones

Jeremiah 20:9

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Text

Jeremiah 11:1-17

Topic

Even though God's Word had been rediscovered, the people of Judah continued to burn incense to Baal

Title

*"It's a Whole New Baal Game"*

## Introduction

From the assassination of John F. Kennedy to the death of Diana, Princess of Wales. From Roswell, New Mexico, to Nasa's moon landings. **Every major event of the last 2,000 years has prompted a conspiracy theory.**

That's the opening paragraph of a series of articles by *The Telegraph*, a United Kingdom publication, called "The 30 Greatest Conspiracy Theories." Their list includes things as serious as September 11th and as curious as whether or not Paul was dead.

There *was* a conspiracy - **a real one** - in sixth century Judah. It's mentioned in verse nine of our text where we read, "a **conspiracy** has been found among the men of Judah and among the inhabitants of Jerusalem."

What was it? Twice we are told that the Jews were "offering incense to Baal" (v13 & 17). We might call it 'the Baal Conspiracy.'

Not everyone was involved, however. Jeremiah was going against the flow. For his part he was involved in a resurgence of reading and preaching God's Word.

I may sound like a crazed conspiracy theorist for saying this, but Baal is still with us today. As we work through these verses we'll see two things: #1 You Can Get Into A Bible Resurgency, or #2 You Can Give In To A Baal Conspiracy.

#1 You Can Get Into  
A Bible Resurgency  
(v1-8)

The word "covenant" is repeated five times in the first eight verses. It's referring to the discovery of a portion of God's Word by the high priest, Hilkiah, when repairs were being made to the Temple at Jerusalem.

According to Deuteronomy 31:24-27, there was to be a copy of this Book of the Law beside the ark of the covenant. But it had been forgotten, neglected, lost as it were. Rediscovered by Hilkiah, he gave it to Shaphan the scribe who took it to, and read it to, King Josiah.

Josiah was struck with grief and terror, certain that the LORD was furious with him and his people for their disobedience. Immediately Josiah set upon a program to eliminate pagan worship and obey the ancient covenant of the LORD. He toured the land, destroying pagan shrines, and he celebrated the Passover for the first time in decades.

Jeremiah was excited about the resurgency of the Word of God. He went around on assignment from God urging his countrymen to heed the Word they were hearing.

Jeremiah 11:1 The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying,  
Jeremiah 11:2 "Hear the words of this covenant, and speak to the men of Judah and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem;  
Jeremiah 11:3 and say to them, 'Thus says the LORD God of Israel: "Cursed is the man who does not obey the words of this covenant  
Jeremiah 11:4 which I commanded your fathers in the day I brought them out of the land of Egypt, from the iron furnace, saying, 'Obey My voice, and do according to all that I command you; so shall you be My people, and I will be your God,'  
Jeremiah 11:5 that I may establish the oath which I have sworn to your fathers, to give them 'a land flowing with milk and honey,' as it is this day." ' " And I answered and said, "So be it, LORD."

Scholars mostly agree that what was rediscovered in the Temple was a portion of the Book of Deuteronomy - the portion that reiterated the covenant God made with Israel at Mount Sinai when He delivered the Jews from 400 years of slavery to Egypt.

It was a conditional covenant in that God promised material and physical blessings for obedience but warned of cursing and judgment for disobedience.

The Jews had voluntarily accepted the conditional terms, both for themselves and their future offspring. It was binding on the Jews throughout their generations.

Jeremiah 11:6 Then the LORD said to me, "Proclaim all these words in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem, saying: 'Hear the words of this covenant and do them.

Jeremiah was to go on tour "proclaim[ing]" the Word of God and then end his reading of it with an exhortation for the people to heed it.

Anytime you read the Word, there ought to be the expectation that it will not return void but instead accomplish mighty things in and through the hearers. At the same time there is often the experience that very little actual change occurs in the hearers. The fault cannot be with the Word, since it is alive and powerful to the saving of the soul. There must be a dullness or a defiance in the hearers, therefore, when a person can listen but walk away unchanged, unchallenged.

The Jews had a history of walking away unchanged and unchallenged.

Jeremiah 11:7 For I earnestly exhorted your fathers in the day I brought them up out of the land of Egypt, until this day, rising early and exhorting, saying, "Obey My voice."  
Jeremiah 11:8 Yet they did not obey or incline their ear, but everyone followed the dictates of his evil heart; therefore I will bring upon them all the words of this covenant, which I commanded them to do, but which they have not done.' "

God reveals Himself as being "earnest" and "early" in "exhorting" us.

- One possible translation of “earnest” is *diligent*. God is diligent to instruct us from His Word. There are many possible examples I could use. For instance, have you ever gone through a day or a week and had the experience of hearing the same passage read or taught by different means? You might read it in your devotions, then hear it in church, then again on the radio. It is God being diligent to reach your heart with His Word.
- God is “early.” The word comes from a root word that would be used to describe loading-up your donkey first thing in the morning to get a head start on the journey for that day. It indicates that God has, each day, a “load” for you to carry. He doesn’t just load you up, however. Remember Jesus said that He would be your yokefellow, shouldering the load with you, and that His load each day (His “burden”) would therefore be “light.”
- God “exhorts” us. It’s a complicated word whose root means *to duplicate* or *to repeat* but it’s come to mean *to warn*. In other words, God makes Himself clear to us by repetition, warning us for our own good. As Mark Twain was quoted as saying, “It isn’t the parts of the Bible I don’t understand that bother me. *It’s the parts that I do understand.*”

All we need, according to verse eight, is an “ear.” But it must be an “ear” that is “incline[d]” to “obey” what is heard.

The Jews in Judah and Jerusalem heard with their ears but instead “followed the dictates of [their] evil heart[s].” They listened to their own hearts rather than hearing God’s heart expressed through the Word He spoke to them.

We need ears to hear. How do I develop ears to hear? Well, your spiritual ears, or we might say your heart, can only be opened by the Word of God, but it seems it must be the Word of God that you act upon. The more you hear and actually heed, the more you will hear... and the more you will heed!

You hear something from the Lord, through reading or listening to His Word. He’s enabling you to do something or to stop doing something. If you obey, He shares more of His heart.

If you don't obey, He keeps repeating Himself - **for your good**. If God seems indifferent, distant, uninvolved, He's not. He is always earnest and early to exhort you. But you must respond to His exhortation with obedience.

Jeremiah experienced a resurgence in the Word. He was hearing it fresh. So can we!

God has been talking to you this week. He's talking to you right now. What's He saying? Hear it, then heed it. If what He's directing or asking seems a burden, it's not because His "burden" is light.

#2 You Can Give In To  
A Baal Conspiracy  
(v9-17)

Burning incense to the Canaanite god, Baal, figures prominently in the remaining verses. Interesting thing about Baal. It seems that it was a catch-all name, or title, for a number of deities. Baal derives from a word meaning *master*. Baal wasn't one particular god or idol; it was the name a culture gave their particular god or idol because he was supposedly their "master."

This opens up our understanding of how, today, we are still be affected by Baal even though we don't call it that or have a particular idol representing it. Whoever or whatever we yield ourselves to as a "master," if it isn't Jesus Christ, becomes our Baal. It can be a passion, or a possession, or a person. But whoever or whatever it is, it is Baal.

And it is a conspiracy in that the devil is the one who started us thinking that we could get out from under God as our master. He told Eve, who sold Adam on the idea, that we each could be as god. In other words, we didn't need God as our master but could be our own masters. That lie plunged all of creation into the fall.

How do you know if you're part of a Baal conspiracy? Well, for sure if you are sinning you are a conspirator. You've decided to let some other person or passion or possession be your master instead of God.

Perhaps you are in love. But is it a biblical love? Is it a relationship, for example, with a nonbeliever? Then it is Baal for you - because God, as master, warns you against it in His Word but you are ignoring Him and following the dictates of your own heart.

Something seemingly 'good' can take the place of God - even something you do supposedly for Him and in His name. In my own orbit I've seen a lot of guys become mastered by the ministry and sacrifice their families along the way.

Let's see what more we can glean from the remaining verses.

Jeremiah 11:9 And the LORD said to me, "A conspiracy has been found among the men of Judah and among the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

Jeremiah 11:10 They have turned back to the iniquities of their forefathers who refused to hear My words, and they have gone after other gods to serve them; the house of Israel and the house of Judah have broken My covenant which I made with their fathers."

You'd think the Jews in Judah would have learned from looking at the history of Israel. Why didn't they?

Well, first of all, the human heart has a tremendous capacity for deception. In the case of Judah, part of their Baal conspiracy was the lie that God would protect the Temple and His city from ruin.

Second of all, if we have Baal in our lives we always think it is subordinate to God so it's not that big a deal. In other words, as long as God is our master passion we think we can harbor other mini-passions even if they are contrary to Him and to His Word.

Jeremiah 11:11 Therefore thus says the LORD: "Behold, I will surely bring calamity on them which they will not be able to escape; and though they cry out to Me, I will not listen to them.

Jeremiah 11:12 Then the cities of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem will go and cry out to the gods to whom they offer incense, but they will not save them at all in the time of their trouble.

It initially seems disturbing that though the people "cry out," God "will not listen to them." The context shows that though they cry out, they were

refusing to repent. They expected God to help them while they continued in disobedience.

Jeremiah 11:13 For according to the number of your cities were your gods, O Judah; and according to the number of the streets of Jerusalem you have set up altars to that shameful thing, altars to burn incense to Baal.

They served many gods but God considered them all “Baal” because the Jews had given themselves over to them as masters.

Jeremiah 11:14 "So do not pray for this people, or lift up a cry or prayer for them; for I will not hear them in the time that they cry out to Me because of their trouble.

God would not “hear” them doesn’t mean He didn’t hear them; of course He did. **He was ‘hearing’ them the way they chose to ‘hear’ Him.** They heard but refused to heed and so did God hear **them** and refuse to heed.

All they needed to do was repent. But they wanted to continue to serve two or more masters - God and whatever else their hearts were set upon.

I offer as an illustration marital love. Do you want to share the person you love with all your heart with a third person? Unless you are a polygamist, the answer is, *“Of course not!”*

God has loved you with an everlasting love *from eternity through eternity*. He will not share you, especially not with some other master that will only deceive and destroy you. He can’t share you and really be a God of love. He must be jealous for you; and He must act upon His jealousy to retrieve you - from yourself if necessary.

Listen to God’s tenderness in the next two verses.

Jeremiah 11:15 "What has My beloved to do in My house, Having done lewd deeds with many? And the holy flesh has passed from you. When you do evil, then you rejoice.  
Jeremiah 11:16 The LORD called your name, Green Olive Tree, Lovely and of Good Fruit. With the noise of a great tumult He has kindled fire on it, And its branches are broken.

God employed two illustrations.

1. First He illustrated His love for Judah as that of a faithful husband with a whoring wife. "Holy flesh" is a reference to their sacrifices in the Temple. They kept making them, kept outwardly the rituals of Judaism; but they also worshipped "evil."
2. Second He illustrated His care and plan for Judah as that of an olive tree He had planted and was constantly tending in order to bring forth abundant fruit. Instead He must break-off its branches and burn it down, seeing it produced no fruit.

Jeremiah 11:17 "For the LORD of hosts, who planted you, has pronounced doom against you for the evil of the house of Israel and of the house of Judah, which they have done against themselves to provoke Me to anger in offering incense to Baal."

"Offering incense to Baal" was the outward expression of their inward disposition to serve two masters - God and something else.

Jesus once said,

Matthew 6:24 "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other..."

The apostle Paul said,

Romans 6:16 Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?

There exists, still, a Baal conspiracy. Satan's lie, that we can be as God, reverberates in our flesh and is fueled by the world around us.

It's not the only voice we hear, however. God is speaking - constantly speaking - through His Word. He is revealing Himself as our Master with nothing but the best intentions for bringing us to completion as His special projects.

The Word is available to us. We hear it. Let's heed it - **all of it** - and let God be Master.



**Studies in the Book of Jeremiah**