

A Fire in My Bones

Jeremiah, one of the great prophets of the Old Testament, had moments of reluctance. When the Lord called him Jeremiah said, "Alas, Lord God! Behold, I do not know how to speak, because I am a youth" (Jer. 1:6). The Lord assured him that he would be able to speak due to the deliverance of the Lord (Jer. 1:7-10).

Jeremiah would still have a difficult time because the kingdom of Judah was involved in much sin and depravity. The Northern Kingdom of Israel, due to their idolatrous sins, had been conquered by the Assyrians. Yet the Southern Kingdom of Judah learned nothing from this. Now the Babylonians were poised to punish Judah. God sent Jeremiah with a message of repentance, but Judah did not want to hear it.

Jeremiah's message was not well received and actually angered the hearers. They took out their anger on the prophet. Jeremiah was, at first, ignored, but he continued unabated. Later they mocked him and, finally, openly persecuted him. It was enough to bring him a brief moment of disillusionment. Jeremiah said, "O LORD, You have deceived me and I was deceived; You have overcome me and prevailed. I have become a laughing-stock all day long; everyone mocks me. For each time I speak, I cry aloud; I proclaim violence and destruction, because for me the word of the LORD has resulted in reproach and derision all day long. But if I say, 'I will not remember Him or speak anymore in His name,' then in my heart it becomes like a burning fire shut up in my bones; and I am weary of holding it in, and I cannot endure it" (Jer. 20:7-9).

Jeremiah really felt it. The lack of fervor for God was so persistent that it had begun to even affect him! Though he was ready to quit due to this indifference on the part of the people, he found that he could not quit. He did not like the scorn and mistreatment, but he simply could not stop delivering God's message. Did you notice how he said that when he tried to hold back it was "like a burning fire shut up in my bones"?

Let me speak on behalf of preachers for a moment. I remember the first time I ever stood before a group and preached. I was scared to death. I could not wait for it to get over. I was fearful that I would "fall on my face." Yet, when it was over I felt a compelling desire to do it again. The fear soon vanished away, but that desire to preach has never diminished. It is a fire in the bones and I am sure there are others who would say the same. However, this fire in the bones should not just be in preachers. I see where it was in the New Testament. After all Paul said, "woe is me if I do not preach the gospel" (1 Cor. 9:16). I also see where there were many brethren, not all preachers, driven out of Jerusalem

after the persecution of Stephen. These "went about preaching the word" (Acts 8:1-4). I suppose they had a fire in their bones.

What Jeremiah had, what Paul had, what the brethren in Acts 8 had, and what we all should have is a passion for the word of God. Without this passion we will not be faithful ourselves and we will not teach anyone anywhere. We will become dry branches fit only to be gathered up and burned (see. Jn. 15:6). This passion is what makes for stimulating teaching and discussion. It is what allows one to persevere in time of trial. Is there such a fire in your bones?

~Terry