

Jeremiah 20:9

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Then I said, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name. But his word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay.

Analysis

This verse captures Jeremiah's internal struggle with his prophetic calling. 'Then I said, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name' reveals the prophet's decision to quit—to stop prophesying and cease representing Yahweh. The persecution, rejection, and mockery (vv. 7-8) had become unbearable. Jeremiah resolves to remain silent. 'But his word was in mine heart as a burning fire' uses the Hebrew *esh* (אֵשׁ, fire) and *bo'eret* (בָּעֵרֶת, burning)—intense, consuming flame imagery. God's word isn't merely intellectual knowledge but an inner compulsion, a spiritual force that cannot be contained. 'Shut up in my bones' employs *atsar* (אַצָּר), meaning confined, restrained, or imprisoned within his physical being. The word has penetrated his skeleton, the deepest part of his bodily structure, becoming inseparable from his identity. 'And I was weary with forbearing' uses *la'ah* (לָאָהָה), meaning exhausted, worn out with the effort of restraining the message. The attempt to suppress God's word drains more energy than speaking it. 'And I could not stay' (*lo-ukal kul*, לֹא-אָכֵל כָּל) means 'I was not able to endure it'—the suppression became impossible. The fire had to find release. This paradox—unbearable persecution when he speaks, unbearable compulsion when he's silent—defines the prophetic burden. Jeremiah discovers that silencing God's word is more painful than suffering for proclaiming it. The verse illustrates that authentic calling from God creates internal necessity—"Woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!" (1 Corinthians 9:16). It demonstrates that God's word possesses inherent power and urgency that transcends human comfort, that divine

calling may create suffering but cannot be abandoned, and that the cost of disobedience exceeds the cost of obedience.

Historical Context

This confession appears in Jeremiah's second personal lament (Jeremiah 20:7-18), following his release from stocks after Pashhur the priest beat and imprisoned him for prophesying (20:1-6). By this point (likely during Jehoiakim's reign, circa 605-598 BC), Jeremiah had endured years of mockery, rejection, and persecution. His prophecies of coming judgment made him hated. The phrase 'I am in derision daily, every one mocketh me' (v. 7) reveals constant social ostracism. In ancient honor-shame cultures, public ridicule was devastating. Jeremiah's natural human response was to quit—stop prophesying and escape persecution. Many prophets faced similar temptations: Moses wanted to die (Numbers 11:15), Elijah fled and requested death (1 Kings 19:4), Jonah ran from his calling (Jonah 1). Yet Jeremiah discovered that God's word possessed him so completely that silence was impossible. The 'fire in his bones' metaphor may relate to the physical sensation of overwhelming urgency—what we might call 'a burden' or 'holy restlessness.' This internal compulsion distinguished true prophets from false prophets who spoke their own inventions. True prophets couldn't help but speak God's word regardless of consequences. Peter and John later testified: 'We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard' (Acts 4:20). The verse encourages believers facing persecution—the internal witness of God's Spirit and the truth of His word create compelling force that outlasts external opposition.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Study Questions

1. Have you ever wanted to quit serving God due to difficulty or opposition, and what sustained you or would sustain you through such times?

2. What does Jeremiah's experience teach about the difference between human-initiated religious activity and God-compelled calling?
3. How does this verse help us discern authentic spiritual calling versus mere personal ambition or temporary enthusiasm?
4. In what ways does God's word become like 'fire' in our hearts when we try to suppress or ignore it?
5. What comfort does this passage offer to those who feel overwhelmed by the cost of obedience but cannot escape God's calling?

Interlinear Text

לֹא	אִמְרָת	אַזְכָּר	בְּ	אַל	אָזְבֵּן	רְ	עִת
Then I said	H3808	I will not make mention	H2142	H3808	of him nor speak	H1696	H5750
H559			H3820			H784	
בְּשָׁמָן	וְ	בְּלֹבִי	בְּלֹבִי	שָׁ	רָתָה	בְּ	עַל
any more in his name	H8034	H1961	But his word was in mine heart	H3820	fire	H1197	
H6113	H6106				H784		
שְׁתַּעֲלִם	בְּעַצְמָתִי	וְנַלְאָתֵת	כְּלֹכֶל	לְ	אָזְלָה	כִּי	אָזְלָה
shut up in my bones	H3811	and I was weary	H3557	H3808	and I could	H3201	

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 39:3 (Parallel theme): My heart was hot within me, while I was musing the fire burned: then spake I with my tongue,

Acts 4:20 (Parallel theme): For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.

Ezekiel 3:14 (Parallel theme): So the spirit lifted me up, and took me away, and I went in bitterness, in the heat of my spirit; but the hand of the LORD was strong upon me.

Acts 17:16 (Parallel theme): Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry.

Jeremiah 6:11 (Parallel theme): Therefore I am full of the fury of the LORD; I am weary with holding in: I will pour it out upon the children abroad, and upon the assembly of young men together: for even the husband with the wife shall be taken, the aged with him that is full of days.

Luke 9:62 (Parallel theme): And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.

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