

## **THE WORD OF GOD AS FIRE IN YOUR MOUTH**

**Today's Text: Jeremiah Chaps 5-6**

### **Extracts:**

- a) **Therefore thus says the Lord, God of hosts, "Because you speak this word, behold, *I will make My words in your mouth fire, and this people wood, and it shall devour them*" [Jer. 5: 14]**
- b) **[Thus says the Lord], "I have set you as an assayer and a fortress among My people, that you may know and test their way. ... *The bellows blow fiercely, the lead is consumed by the fire; the smelter refines in vain, for the wicked are not drawn off. People will call them rejected silver*" [Jer. 6: 27, 29, 30]**

*According to surveys by the National Fire Protection Association (USA), 75% of fires caused by lightning, using 1994-1998 annual averages, struck property outside of residential and non-residential structures or vehicles.<sup>1</sup> Such outdoor fires affected brush, grass rubbish, outside spills with fire, etc. In other words, lightning was "invited" by extremely combustible substances in the vicinity, especially wood. Wood comes from dead and dry plants that burn with the slightest heat of ignition. For example, every year, we hear of huge and expansive fires in places around Malibu, California, where dry chaparral brush and north-to-south running canyons provide the ideal turf for strong wind-driven flames to spread almost uncontrollably.<sup>2</sup>*

*In the spiritual realm, fire by lightning is analogous to fire from God. For example, God appeared to Moses in the form of a burning bush [Ex. 3: 2], and vindicated Elijah by fire [1 Kgs 18: 38]. In fact, God is referred to as a consuming fire [Heb. 12: 29]. In today's lesson, God empowered the prophet Jeremiah's mouth to be God's fire and the nation of Israel as wood. What does that mandate mean and why was it granted to a mere mortal? Do we have that fire in our mouths? How can we use it properly? Can it not be abused? These and more are the issues that we shall examine in today's study.*

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<sup>1</sup> "Fires and losses caused by lightning," National Fire Protection Association, [www.nfpa.org/item/Detail.asp?categoryID&itemID=23332&URL=Research%20&%20Reports/Fire%20statistics/Causes](http://www.nfpa.org/item/Detail.asp?categoryID&itemID=23332&URL=Research%20&%20Reports/Fire%20statistics/Causes)

<sup>2</sup> Phillip Carter, "Fires decimate Malibu; winds, brush blamed," [www.dailybruin.ucla.edu/db/issues/96/10.23/news.firemalibu.html](http://www.dailybruin.ucla.edu/db/issues/96/10.23/news.firemalibu.html)

## 1. Fire is double-edged!

There is the story of a homeless man who was arraigned before a magistrate court for setting fire to a major rubber plantation in the Mid-western part of Nigeria. When he was invited to defend himself, he maintained that, as far as he knew, he only made a fire to prepare his dinner. The one that destroyed the rubber plantation was caused by the wind. Therefore, it was the wind, not himself, who should be in the dock! That story suggests that fire can be two-edged. That is, it can build and it can destroy.

We all know the role of fire in *preparing our delicious meals*. If you are like me, you will enjoy those outdoor barbeques with the smell of smoke mingled with the fresh aroma of meats and spices. You can then imagine how Peter and six other disciples felt when the risen Christ appeared to them by the Sea of Galilee. All night, they had caught nothing. He charged them to cast their net on the right side of the boat and they caught 153 fish! You can be sure that they had become hungry. But, as they came ashore, “there was a fire of coals there, and fish laid on it, and bread.” Jesus told them to bring some of their catch and to “come and eat breakfast” [Jn 21: 1-12]. However, unless properly controlled, cooking can invite fires. For example, cooking-related activities are among the leading causes of fire in the National Fire Protection Association surveys, based on 1999-2002 averages, exceeded only by intentional fires.<sup>3</sup>

Fire is also used for *warming* ourselves in the event of cold. If you live in the part of the world with winter or cold conditions at certain times of the year, the fireplace can be a major port of call. We recall that after Paul had survived a shipwreck on the way to Rome, the best thing that the natives of Malta did for the survivors was that “they kindled a fire and made us welcome, because of the rain that was falling and because of the cold” [Acts 28: 1-2]. Nevertheless, we also know that people make fire to burn their enemies alive. A case in point was Nebuchadnezzar who prepared a burning fiery furnace for three young Jewish exiles, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, for refusing to worship the image erected by the king [Dan. 3: 1-22].

With respect to God, fire has been used as a *sign* from heaven. For example, He appeared to Moses on Mount Horeb in the form of a burning bush [Ex. 3: 2], and guided the children of Israel through the wilderness as a pillar of fire by night [Ex. 13: 21]. When there was a contest between Elijah and 450 prophets of Baal, the criterion that was agreed was that the God that answered by fire was the true God [1 Kgs 18: 24]. When the Holy Spirit descended on the disciples on Pentecost day, it was in the form of “divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them” [Acts 2: 3].

<sup>3</sup> “Leading causes of non-home structure fires: 1999-2002 annual averages,” [www.nfpa.org/itemDetail.asp?categoryID=952&itemID=23311&URL=Research%20Reports/Fire%20statistics/Causes&cookie%5Ftest=1](http://www.nfpa.org/itemDetail.asp?categoryID=952&itemID=23311&URL=Research%20Reports/Fire%20statistics/Causes&cookie%5Ftest=1). Events of September 11, 2001 excluded.

We see from the above discussion that fire has good and bad uses. In today's lesson, God is talking about His fire in relation to us as wood. That suggests that there is something in us that attracts God's fire of judgment. The word of God says, "where there is no wood, the fire goes out" [**Prov. 26: 20**]. It is important, therefore, that we know how we provide the wood that attracts God's harsh judgment.

## 2. Fire loves wood!

It is well known that wood burns quite easily. In the spiritual realm, how do we provide such wood that "burns quite easily"? Let us develop the subject by first looking at one case from the Bible.

You may recall the story of Ahaziah, the wicked son who had succeeded his wicked father, king Ahab of Israel [**1 Kgs 22: 51**]. One day, the young king fell through the lattice of his upper room and injured himself. He wanted to know if he would recover. Instead of sending his messengers to the prophet of God, Elijah, he referred them to inquire of Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron [**2 Kgs 1: 1-2**]. God asked Elijah to confront the king's messengers to ask why they should go to an idol when there was a true prophet of God in Israel. Therefore, they should go back and tell the king that he would die from his wounds [**vv. 3-4**].

The king was angry to hear such unfavourable words from the same prophet who have given his father, Ahab, such a tough time. He sent fifty "policemen" to arrest Elijah. As they came near, Elijah told their captain, "*If I am a man of God, then let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty men.*" Fire in deed came down from heaven and consumed the captain and his men [**vv. 5-10**]. Another set followed and was also consumed. However, the third captain was wise. As soon as he and his men came near the prophet, he fell on his knees and pleaded, "Man of God, please let my life and the life of these fifty servants of yours be precious in your sight." God restrained Elijah and asked him to go with the men and not to be afraid [**vv. 13-15**].

What does that teach us? Firstly, the fire of God is in the mouth of his messengers, that is, prophets, pastors, and so on. When they speak as the oracles of God, there is fire because God "confirms the word of His servant, and performs the counsel of His messengers" [**Is. 44: 26**]. Secondly, the fire is active against those who sin against God and *persist* in it. The king's servants that died were those who came to execute a wicked order. The ones that were saved were those who *repented*. Therefore, when we sin and refuse to *confess it but persist in it, we are providing wood for God's fire*. Let us see how this principle has been applied in today's text from the book of Jeremiah.

## 3. But God is a consuming fire!

God was sending Jeremiah to the nation of Judah, yet He talked of “you nations”, “O congregation” and “O earth” [Jer. 6: 18, 19]. Therefore, we can assume that the message in these two chapters equally applies to the whole world and to our specific countries and congregations. God said to Jeremiah, “Behold, I will make My words in your mouth fire, and this people wood and it shall devour them” [Jer. 5: 14]. What were the people’s sins that turned them into wood? Here are some of them:

a) *Lying and falsehood*

God asked Jeremiah to search the streets of Jerusalem to see if he could find a man that sought the truth and He would pardon him. Unfortunately, “they swear falsely” [Jer. 5: 1-2]. For persisting in falsehood, God would send lions, desert wolves and leopards from the forest to slay them in the cities [v. 6].

Is there anyone who does not lie these days? Lying takes different forms, such as taking bribes to pervert justice or truth, false tax returns, backbiting and lying against innocent colleagues, self-exaggeration, etc. In the sight of God, a lie, no matter how small is a lie and “all liars” will be shut out of God’s kingdom [Rev. 21: 8]. Satan is the father of lies [Jn 8: 44]!

b) *Idolatry and adultery*

God asked the people through Jeremiah, “How shall I pardon you for this? Your children have forsaken Me and sworn by those that are not gods. When I had fed them to the full, then they committed adultery” [Jer. 5: 7, 8]. Anything in our lives that we place above God is an idol. It does not have to be an ugly-looking carved image. It could be your career or lust or ambition or addiction or even your denomination’s leader or your mode of worship. *Whatever prevents you from totally surrendering your life to God and His Christ is your idol.* God told Jeremiah’s people that should they persist in idolatry (unfaithfulness to God) and adultery (unfaithfulness to man), they faced destruction [vv. 10, 17] and exile [vv. 15, 16]. How many people do you know today who have been destroyed by shame, drugs, and sexual immorality and such like sins? What of the numerous people who have been exiled into loneliness, hardship and anonymity?

c) *Wickedness and rebellion*

The people had lost the fear of God with “defiant and rebellious” hearts [vv. 23, 24]. Among them were wicked people who “lie in wait as one who sets snares; they set a trap; they catch men, as a cage is full of birds, so their houses are full of deceit” [vv. 26, 27]. They fed fat on neglecting the cause of the fatherless and prospered on not defending the right of the

needy [v. 28]. Even worse, false prophets [Jer. 5: 31; 6: 14] and fearless priests [Jer. 5: 31] paraded themselves as true messengers of God. Well, their fire would come in the form of the fall of Jerusalem [Jer. 6: 17-22] and nobody (young and old, husbands and wives, etc.) would be spared [vv. 10-12].

Wickedness is worse today than ever before. Even in the house of God, whom you help or love depends to a large extent on the denomination or congregation to which they belong or their social status! We hate sinners even more than their sins and, therefore, they are not encouraged to repent. It is easier to reach the President of America than to obtain an appointment with some church leaders. Why will God's fire not fall? After all, "the Lord will destroy the house of the proud" [Prov. 15: 25].

d) *Non-repentance*

The Lord urged the people to "ask for the old paths where the good way is, and walk in it" but they replied, "We will not walk in it." Then He set watchmen over them and told them to listen to the sound of the trumpet, and the people said, "We will not listen." In response, God said, "I will *certainly* bring calamity on this people, because they have not heeded My words, nor My law, but rejected it" [Jer. 6: 16-19]. Having chosen the path of non-repentance, God rejected their worship and offerings [v. 20] since obedience is better than sacrifice. Moreover, He laid stumbling blocks before them and fast-forwarded their exile into Babylon [vv. 21-22]. So, why work so hard to serve God and yet refuse to obey Him? That was like passing through fire without being refined [v. 29]!

Have you audited your worship lately? Are you working so hard in several church committees and leading numerous prayer sessions or outreach ministries, and yet harbouring and thriving in unconfessed sins? You think that God does not know because we do not know?

#### 4. Conclusion: Get out of the woods fast!

Let us go to the story of Jesus with His disciples heading in the direction of Jerusalem. He had sent messengers ahead to prepare a place for them in a Samaritan village but the people turned down His request because they were not happy that His destination was beyond their place, to Jerusalem. When His disciples, James and John, saw what had happened, they asked Jesus, "Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?" Jesus rebuked them and said, "You do not know what *manner of spirit you are of*, for the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them" [Lk 9: 51-56]. In the light of Christ's atoning death for us on Calvary, our sins are no longer visited with instant fire of justice as in the Old Testament!

Instead, God is “longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that *all should come to repentance*” [2 Pet. 3: 9]. .

Therefore, there is yet hope. Speaking through Jeremiah, God is saying to you, “Stand in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, *where the good way is*, and walk in it; *then you will find rest for your souls*” [Jer. 6: 16]. The good way is the one that leads you to God and His kingdom, that grants you peace on earth. That good way is Jesus, the way to the Father and the truth of life.

When you confess your sins and renounce sin, you will be out of the woods. That way, even when you pass through fire, it will not burn you because it is no longer meant for you! Thereafter, God will also put His word in your mouth as fire to instruct and to correct those who have not returned to the good way. If they refuse to heed your warning, then His word in your mouth becomes fire to execute His judgment.

God is a consuming fire. So is His word in the mouth of the true believer.