



# The **Fiery** Bones

Jeremiah 20:9

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Text

Jeremiah 23:9-40

Topic

God tells Jeremiah that the prophets and the priests are profane men who have have profaned His house, the Temple of the Lord

Title

*"Habitat for Profanity"*

Introduction

If you want a faster pace than baseball... More brute strength than the NFL... A greater sense of team play than basketball... Without a doubt more fights than hockey... I've got the sport for you.

Coming up in just a few days is the annual North American Wife-Carrying Championship.

You heard me. Wife-Carrying. Male competitors race while each carrying a female teammate. The objective is for the male to carry the female through a special obstacle track in the fastest time.

Several types of carry may be practiced: piggyback, fireman's carry (over the shoulder), or Estonian-style (the wife hangs upside-down with her legs around the husband's shoulders, holding onto his waist).

Major wife-carrying competitions are held in Sonkajärvi, Finland (where the prize depends on the wife's weight in beer); Monona, Wisconsin; Minocqua, Wisconsin; and Marquette, Michigan.

The North American Wife Carrying Championships take place every year on Columbus Day Weekend in October at Sunday River Ski Resort in Newry, Maine.

Does this have anything to do with our text in Jeremiah? It does indirectly.

There is a very interesting word in our text, found in verse eleven and in verse fifteen. It's the word translated by the NKJV "profane" (v11) and "profaneness" (v15). Other English words used to translate the Hebrew word are *ungodly*, *defiled*, *unholy*, and *polluted*. The Greek word is *profanum*, which means *before*, or *outside of, the temple*.

In literal terms it describes the *threshold* of a temple. Figuratively it illustrates a person who is *on the threshold* of a temple but doesn't go in.

(I got sidetracked on wife-carrying because the word 'threshold' got me thinking of the ancient custom of a groom carrying his bride over the *threshold* and into their new home).

Jeremiah calls out and rebukes the false prophets of Judah. They were ungodly and defiled and unholy and they were spreading spiritual pollution.

To capture all of those ideas in an illustration Jeremiah described them as being on the threshold of the Temple. Physically they still went in the Temple and went through the motions. But spiritually speaking God saw them as on the threshold, outside.

Sometimes we say a person has one foot in the world and one foot in the church. The false prophets in Judah didn't even have one foot in the Temple. They were profane, outside on the threshold, in the world.

The question for us today is, Am I content to be in the world and on the threshold? or Am I carried over the threshold by Jesus?

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 The Lord In His Love Wants To Carry You Over The Threshold, and #2 Your Love For The World Will Keep You On The Threshold.

#1 The Lord In His Love  
Wants To Carry You Over The Threshold  
(v9-11)

Before getting a look at the false prophets we get a glimpse at the true prophet, Jeremiah.

Jeremiah 23:9-10

9 My heart within me is broken Because of the prophets; All my bones shake. I am like a drunken man, And like a man whom wine has overcome, Because of the Lord, And because of His holy words.

10 For the land is full of adulterers; For because of a curse the land mourns. The pleasant places of the wilderness are dried up. Their course of life is evil, And their might is not right.

Jeremiah's contemporaries were "adulterers" pursuing an "evil" "course of life." They were committing spiritual adultery by worshipping idols and they were committing all manner of sexual sin as well.

The glimpse we get of Jeremiah is that of a believer who remains sensitive to sin because he is under the influence of God.

See how sensitive he was. The sin surrounding him broke his heart. It caused him to tremble. He sensed that there was a "curse" on the "land" because of the sins of these men.

As for his tenderness toward God he described himself as "a drunken man" whom "wine had overcome" "because of the Lord, and because of His holy words." We'll miss what he was saying here unless we remember that later, in the New Testament, the apostle Paul compares the influence of God in our lives to being drunk. It isn't that we act drunk or out of control. The idea is that we are influenced by God like a drunken man is under the influence of alcohol. With the drunk, he consumes alcohol and it influences him. With God, we're consumed with Him and He influences us.

One author described it this way:

When we are drunk with wine, we take in a foreign substance which has an effect upon our brains, and as we begin to think differently, under the influence of the alcohol, we begin to talk differently and act differently.

So also when we allow the Holy Spirit to fill us, He begins by renewing our minds, our thinking comes under the influence and control of the Holy Spirit, and when our thinking changes, our speaking and acting changes. We are under the Spirit's control and influence.

In verse eleven God responded to Jeremiah.

Jeremiah 23:11

11 "For both prophet and priest are profane; Yes, in My house I have found their wickedness," says the Lord.

God called prophets **and** priests "profane." They were "in [God's house]" but because of their wickedness He saw them as outside of the Temple, on the threshold, with their backs to Him.

We are God's temple on the earth - both individually and corporately. Still I think we can ask of ourselves: Am I 'in' the temple in the same way Jeremiah was - remaining and becoming more sensitive to sin because I am under the influence of God?

*If your love has waxed cold, let the Lord's love carry you back over the threshold.*

By mere observation I think you can see that by-and-large Christians are getting less sensitive to sin. They are becoming more influenced by the world than by God.

Let's take our stand **in** the Temple, not **on** the threshold. If your love has waxed cold, let the Lord's love carry you back over the threshold. Do the first works reminiscent of your first love.

#2 Your Love For The World  
Will Keep You On The Threshold  
(12-40)

We have a lot of ground to cover in the remaining verses. Let's do it by looking for characteristics that would indicate a person is *on* rather than *over* the threshold.

Jeremiah 23:12

12 "Therefore their way shall be to them Like slippery ways; In the darkness they shall be driven on And fall in them; For I will bring disaster on them, The year of their punishment," says the Lord.

We can make application of this to someone who has pulled away from fellowship. Their reasons seem a little vague. They are evasive. Over time they fall away and you see that they have secretly been on a slippery path walking in darkness. *Don't be that person.* Walk in the open, in the light, on firm ground with Jesus.

Jeremiah 23:13

13 "And I have seen folly in the prophets of Samaria: They prophesied by Baal And caused My people Israel to err.

The Northern Kingdom of Israel, whose capital was Samaria, had listened to false prophets to their detriment. Those false prophets had been influenced by the Canaanite god Baal.

In our context this describes a person who wants to borrow wisdom from the world in spiritual matters. One example would be our modern habit of labeling sin as some sort of disorder that is out of my control so I cannot be held responsible for it. Do that and you will remain on the threshold and cut yourself off from the power of God to deliver you from sin through repentance.

Jeremiah 23:14

14 Also I have seen a horrible thing in the prophets of Jerusalem: They commit adultery and walk in lies; They also strengthen the hands of evildoers, So that no one turns back from his wickedness. All of them are like Sodom to Me, And her inhabitants like Gomorrah.

The mention of Sodom and Gomorrah tells us that the "prophets of Jerusalem" were practicing all manner of sexual sin.

They were "walk[ing] in lies." What "lies?" Since their "lies" "strengthen[ed] the hands of evildoers," I'd say their lies involved a relaxation of God's teaching on sexual purity. As believers we must take our stand for marriage and sex only within biblical marriage. It's the *only* over-the-threshold option. Anything else is worldly.

Jeremiah 23:15-17

15 "Therefore thus says the Lord of hosts concerning the prophets: 'Behold, I will feed them with wormwood, And make them drink the water of gall; For from the prophets of Jerusalem Profaneness has gone out into all the land.' "

16 Thus says the Lord of hosts: "Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you. They make you worthless; They speak a vision of their own heart, Not from the mouth of the Lord.

17 They continually say to those who despise Me, 'The Lord has said, "You shall have peace" '; And to everyone who walks according to the dictates of his own heart, they say, 'No evil shall come upon you.' "

Instead of calling people to holiness the false prophets encouraged them they could sin without any fear of the Lord. Don't look for counsel that says it's alright to sin because God will forgive you anyway. And don't give counsel like that.

Jeremiah 23:18

18 For who has stood in the counsel of the Lord, And has perceived and heard His word? Who has marked His word and heard it?

**You** have! If you are a Christian, you have His Word as your "counsel." Not "counsel" as advice you might or might not take, but as truth you will obey.

Jeremiah 23:19-20

19 Behold, a whirlwind of the Lord has gone forth in fury - A violent whirlwind! It will fall violently on the head of the wicked.  
20 The anger of the Lord will not turn back Until He has executed and performed the thoughts of His heart. In the latter days you will understand it perfectly.

"In the latter days" reminds us that the wicked may seem to prosper for a time while we suffer. Remain patient waiting for the Lord. Too many a believer has chosen the threshold because they grew weary in well-doing.



### Jeremiah 23:21-22

21 "I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran. I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied.

22 But if they had stood in My counsel, And had caused My people to hear My words, Then they would have turned them from their evil way And from the evil of their doings.

This reminds me I am obligated to be a source of spiritual help to others. I should serve the Lord as He has called and gifted me in order to further the kingdom so that "people... [can] hear [God's] words..."

### Jeremiah 23:23-24

23 "Am I a God near at hand," says the Lord, "And not a God afar off?

24 Can anyone hide himself in secret places, So I shall not see him?" says the Lord; "Do I not fill heaven and earth?" says the Lord.

Do you have any "secret [hiding] places" where you are sinning? The Lord is there.

### Jeremiah 23:25-32

25 "I have heard what the prophets have said who prophesy lies in My name, saying, 'I have dreamed, I have dreamed!'

26 How long will this be in the heart of the prophets who prophesy lies? Indeed they are prophets of the deceit of their own heart,

27 who try to make My people forget My name by their dreams which everyone tells his neighbor, as their fathers forgot My name for Baal.

28 "The prophet who has a dream, let him tell a dream; And he who has My word, let him speak My word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat?" says the Lord.

29 "Is not My word like a fire?" says the Lord, "And like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?"

30 "Therefore behold, I am against the prophets," says the Lord, "who steal My words every one from his neighbor.

31 Behold, I am against the prophets," says the Lord, "who use their tongues and say, 'He says.'

32 Behold, I am against those who prophesy false dreams," says the Lord, "and tell them, and cause My people to err by their lies and by their recklessness. Yet I did not send them or command them; therefore they shall not profit this people at all," says the Lord.

There will always be false teachers and false prophets. There will be wolves among God's sheep. We must therefore be discerning, applying the Word of God to test the spirits to see if they are from God. Too many believers are on the threshold when they think they are in the temple because they are open to all manner of phenomena that purports to be from the Lord. It's not more spiritual to accept anything rather than test everything.

*It's not more spiritual to accept anything rather than test everything.*

Jeremiah had a reputation for prophesying doom and gloom. *That's because he prophesied doom and gloom.* Not entirely, of course, because even in the doom and gloom there was hope.

Folks made fun of him. God took notice and, in the remaining verses, gave Jeremiah permission to turn the rebuke of the people back on themselves.

## Jeremiah 23:33-40

33 "So when these people or the prophet or the priest ask you, saying, 'What is the oracle of the Lord?' you shall then say to them, 'What oracle?' I will even forsake you," says the Lord.

34 And as for the prophet and the priest and the people who say, 'The oracle of the Lord!' I will even punish that man and his house.

35 Thus every one of you shall say to his neighbor, and every one to his brother, 'What has the Lord answered?' and, 'What has the Lord spoken?'

36 And the oracle of the Lord you shall mention no more. For every man's word will be his oracle, for you have perverted the words of the living God, the Lord of hosts, our God.

37 Thus you shall say to the prophet, 'What has the Lord answered you?' and, 'What has the Lord spoken?'

38 But since you say, 'The oracle of the Lord!' therefore thus says the Lord: 'Because you say this word, "The oracle of the Lord!" and I have sent to you, saying, "Do not say, 'The oracle of the Lord!' "

39 therefore behold, I, even I, will utterly forget you and forsake you, and the city that I gave you and your fathers, and will cast you out of My presence.

40 And I will bring an everlasting reproach upon you, and a perpetual shame, which shall not be forgotten.' "

The word "oracle" is prominent in these verses. It is better translated "burden." The people, when they'd see Jeremiah, would ask, "What burden are you going to put on us today?" God now gave Jeremiah permission to say, "**You** are the burden! You are a burden to the Lord and He will forget you and forsake you and this city and cast you out of His presence."

God did not utterly forsake the Jews nor Jerusalem. Jeremiah's response would shock the people who thought God could not exile them since they were His chosen ones, nor allow Jerusalem to be destroyed since His Temple was there.

What application can we make to ourselves? Maybe this. If a professed believer remains on the threshold, as it were, and continues to bring forth the characteristics we've noted, perhaps they were not a believer after all. They will be lost forever to sin and death and Hell.

If you recognize yourself as being **on** the threshold, repent and let the Lord in His love carry you **over** the threshold.

Be drunk with the Lord; tremble at His presence; grow in sensitivity to sin - both yours and the sin all around you.