

# The Fiery Bones

Jeremiah 20:9

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Text

Jeremiah 10:17-25

Topic

Jeremiah describes God as a loving Father  
Who therefore disciplines His children for their own good

Title

*Back to the Paddle Again*

## Introduction

Times have changed when it comes to disciplining children.

Back in my day every teacher hung a paddle on his or her classroom wall and used it on us when we were unruly. Nearly every parent supported corporal punishment.

That was then and this is now. Corporal punishment of children in schools has been banned in thirty-one states. It's well on its way to being banned in the remaining nineteen states.

An international organization, the *Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children*, reports that thirty-two countries prohibit all corporal punishment of children in all settings, including your home. Supreme Courts in two other countries - Italy and Nepal - have ruled that corporal punishment in child raising is unlawful. At least twenty-three additional countries are actively debating prohibition in their legislatures. The Council of Europe has launched a campaign to ban corporal punishment of children in all its forty-seven member states.

Truth is, even among Christians whose literal reading of the Bible is to spare not the rod, corporal punishment of children is becoming infrequent.

I don't want to get into an argument about the corporal punishment of children. I only presented facts to verify that it is vanishing in order to say this. **A generation of people have grown up with no experience or example of corporal punishment and therefore they do not respect God as someone Who disciplines His own sons and daughters.**

If they are disobedient they think God might 'yell' at them through the Bible, or give them a time-out, but that's about all.

Listen to these verses from the Book of Hebrews.

Hebrews 12:5 And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons:  
"MY SON, DO NOT DESPISE THE CHASTENING OF THE LORD, NOR BE  
DISCOURAGED WHEN YOU ARE REBUKED BY HIM;  
Hebrews 12:6 FOR WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE CHASTENS, AND SCOURGES  
EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES."

The Lord still "chastens" and "scourges" His followers, and He does it because He love them. He does it because He loves you.

Jeremiah understood that the Lord disciplines those He loves. Our text describes His severe discipline of Judah. It does something else, though. It describes God as a disciplinarian; i.e., it reveals the heart behind discipline.

We'll ask ourselves two questions: #1 Are You Submitting Your Heart To God's Discipline?, and #2 Are You Seeing God's Heart As Your Disciplinarian?

#1 Are You Submitting Your Heart  
To God's Discipline?  
(v17-19)

Judah was sinning and they wouldn't quit. God must discipline them. Since God was dealing with them as a nation, He would use another nation as His rod of discipline - as His 'paddle.'

Jeremiah 10:17 Gather up your wares from the land, O inhabitant of the fortress!

Jeremiah 10:18 For thus says the LORD: "Behold, I will throw out at this time The inhabitants of the land, And will distress them, That they may find it so."

In other words, grab anything of value and flee to the "fortress" of Jerusalem, because an enemy was coming to "throw out the inhabitants" of the land surrounding the city. Those huddled behind its walls would finally realize ("find it so") that they were in "distress."

This is like a parent saying, "If you don't stop doing such-and-such, you're going to get a spanking." Then, when the disobedient child continues to rebel, the parent says, "Go to your room and wait for your spanking."

Regardless whether or not you spank your children, you discipline them in some fashion because you love them and for their own good. The chapter in Hebrews we quoted from earlier goes on to say, "no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it."

Discipline isn't simply good for you. It proves something. Do you realize that discipline proves you are a son or daughter who is loved by your Father in Heaven? Jeremiah did and he said,

Jeremiah 10:19 Woe is me for my hurt! My wound is severe. But I say, "Truly this is an infirmity, And I must bear it."

Jeremiah called God's discipline "my hurt" and a "severe" "wound." The Babylonians would come against Judah in three waves over a twenty year period, in 605BC, 597BC, and 586BC. It was in the first invasion that Daniel and his three friends were taken. Ezekiel was among those taken in the second wave. In the final wave Nebuchadnezzar's army would set fire to the royal palace, to the Temple, and all the houses. They broke down the walls around Jerusalem and took most of the people into exile back to Babylon.

Do we think it was excessive? Remember, God was disciplining a nation and He decided to use another nation as His rod.

Jeremiah, who would live through it, did not think it excessive. Or, if he did, he put it into perspective. He said it was an “infirmity, And I must bear it.”

The word translated “infirmity” comes from a root word that can mean *put to pain* or *be wounded*. I believe Jeremiah was using it to describe the pain of the discipline. *This was a swat that would definitely sting!*

(I guess you could also call it a ‘time-out,’ because the Jews would be in Babylon and subject to that government for the next seventy years).

More importantly was Jeremiah’s assessment, “I must bear it.” In other words, he must submit to it because it was an appropriate discipline for their sin, disobedience, and rebellion against God.

God disciplines His children, whom He loves. Exactly when and how He does it is sometimes hard to figure. For example, every sickness is not a discipline, but God can afflict you as a discipline.

Likewise, when tragedy strikes, we must not assume that it can be traced to some specific sins or failures. God puts some of His most obedient children through the severest trials.

Then, too, we sometimes see a believer living in willful, deliberate, blatant rebellion and God seems to do nothing about it.

God is always at work disciplining. For example. Discipline can be preventive. God can bring something into our lives, or withhold something from us, to keep us from harm. Preventive discipline is to be preferred to getting something that will lead to the ruin or wreckage of our lives.

The apostle Paul’s “thorn in the flesh” is a biblical example of a preventive discipline.

God can, and does, mete out what scholars call retributive discipline. That means it comes upon us to deal with specific sin or sins. Jonah is a good example. He ended up in the belly of a great fish as retribution for the

specific sin of disobeying God's command to go to Nineveh and preach to the Assyrians.

In the end, unless I know I am in sin, I cannot always be sure whether I am subject to preventive or retributive discipline. If I know I am in sin, I cannot always understand God's timing in my discipline. His lack of immediate retribution doesn't mean I am getting away with anything.

This is where Jeremiah's words, "I must bear it," apply. I simply submit myself to God, to every circumstance He brings into my life. If it's a trial it can only strengthen my faith. If it's His discipline it will either keep me on the narrow road or it will get me back on it.

Are you living in sin today? **Then repent!**

If you are not living in sin, then think about the situation you find yourself in. Maybe it is severe; maybe you feel wounded and hurt. Can you say, "I must bear it?"

That's the place you want to be in your heart and mind as God works all things together for the good. He's your good heavenly Father Who sees all things and has a wonderful plan He's working out for your life. But that plan is to make you more and more like Jesus and it must involve suffering and sacrifice along the way.

## #2 Are You Seeing God's Heart As Your Disciplinarian? (v20-25)

It seems that the Book of Jeremiah is all about Judah's sin and God's wrath, His judgment. But there is also His compassion, His love. One thing we've been trying to accomplish in our studies through Jeremiah is to show something of the heart, of the nature, of God.

The next few verses show something about God's heart as your disciplinarian. It gives us some of the "why?" He disciplines. For one thing, it is to get you back to a place where He can actively bless you.

Jeremiah 10:20 My tent is plundered, And all my cords are broken; My children have gone from me, And they are no more. There is no one to pitch my tent anymore, Or set up my curtains.

This seems to be God talking. As the Jews continue to sin, and the destruction of their city and Temple approaches as their discipline, God was remembering back to the days when there was no Temple, only the Tabernacle. In those days He would move and the people would disassemble the “tent,” the Tabernacle, and move with Him. He would stop and they would stop and erect the Tabernacle and worship Him.

God was thinking back to their ancestors and lamenting what the current generation of Jews had lost. Oh, they had a beautiful, walled city and a grand Temple - Solomon’s Temple. But in many ways they had been better off as a less settled people with the Tabernacle.

What God was lamenting was that they had lost the desire to worship and serve Him.

You were created to worship and to serve. That’s not a bad thing until you determine to worship and serve self rather than God. Then you lose your humanity, your meaning, your purpose, your joy.

God disciplines His followers to return them to their proper worship and service.

Jeremiah 10:21 For the shepherds have become dull-hearted, And have not sought the LORD; Therefore they shall not prosper, And all their flocks shall be scattered.

The “shepherds” here is a reference to the leaders of God’s earthly people. He saw His followers as sheep, and He saw Himself as their Great Shepherd and their leaders as mere under-shepherds.

The point of this is that God has tender care for you. He thinks of you the way a Good Shepherd thinks of His sheep. When you sin, you are like a lost sheep, in grave danger - whether you know it or not. He comes after you! His discipline is intended to restore you to the safety and protection and provision of the flock. That’s the ‘heart’ behind it.

Jeremiah 10:22 Behold, the noise of the report has come, And a great commotion out of the north country, To make the cities of Judah desolate, a den of jackals.

Jeremiah said that “the noise of the report has come.” In other words, there was advance notice giving opportunity to repent. I mentioned that the invasion of Judah by Babylon came in three waves. I would add that Jeremiah warned the Jews for almost forty years to repent. It’s like a parent counting to a million instead of to three or ten before meting out a swat.

As a disciplinarian, God is more than fair; He is gracious.

Jeremiah 10:23 O LORD, I know the way of man is not in himself; It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps.

If God disciplines, it is only, *always* for our good, to “direct our steps” in such a way as to help us spiritually, never to hinder us.

God is looking ahead. He sees what you will become. If you could see it, you’d want to cooperate. But sometimes we ‘see’ other things, ungodly things, that detour us. So God works through discipline to move us forward.

Jeremiah 10:24 O LORD, correct me, but with justice; Not in Your anger, lest You bring me to nothing.

Jeremiah 10:25 Pour out Your fury on the Gentiles, who do not know You, And on the families who do not call on Your name; For they have eaten up Jacob, Devoured him and consumed him, And made his dwelling place desolate.

The great realization in these verses is that God deals differently with His children than with nonbelievers. He “corrects” you. As we’ve said, His discipline in your life proves He loves you, proves He is in a special relationship with you, proves you are a son or daughter of His.

Eventually God will judge, not discipline, nonbelievers - here called “the Gentiles who do not know [God].” He will hold them especially accountable for what they did to His own special people.

God's disciplines can be severe. One very severe form we see in the Bible is premature death. For example. Some believers in the church at Corinth were approaching the Lord's Supper in a sinful manner.

1 Corinthians 11:30 For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep.

"Sleep," in this context, means "die." Their sin was bringing a discipline of premature death.

The apostle John wrote that we as believers should pray for those whose sin does not lead them to death. But then he also added, "There is a sin leading to death; I do not say that he should make a request for this" (First John 5:16). The "sin unto death" is probably not a specific sin, but a certain kind of sin that is so severe that it merits the physical death of the individual.

We have no idea how many people have died prematurely as a discipline from God. But neither should we speculate.

Again I emphasize that it can be very difficult to determine when what is happening in my life is a preventive discipline. It's not so hard to determine what is a retributive discipline, if I know I am in sin. But even then God works in ways, and has a timing, that I cannot predict.

In the end I must trust and know that "whom the Lord loves, He disciplines." For my part "I must bear it" - and I would add, "I must bear it joyfully," rejoicing I am His child and that He takes the time to discipline me.