



The Fiery Bones

Jeremiah 20:9

Text

Jeremiah 28:1-17

Topic

When Hananiah breaks Jeremiah's wooden yoke
he replaces it with one made of iron

Title

"The Man in the Iron Yoke"

Introduction

Cigarette warning labels can be hazardous to your health.

A recent study concluded that "cigarette warnings... stimulate an area of the smokers' brains called the *nucleus accumbens*, otherwise known as the 'craving spot.'" The warning makes a smoker want to light-up.

It might not be a deterrent to nonsmokers either. There is a growing body of research that suggests warning labels in general - on cigarettes, on alcohol, on food, on drugs - either have no effect or they have the opposite of the effect intended.

Jeremiah had been warning the people of Judah for nearly three decades that God's judgment was coming. He had lately been going around wearing bonds and a yoke around his neck to illustrate their coming captivity in Babylon.

He was sort of a living warning label, as if to say, "Warning: The Sovereign God has determined that continuing in sin is hazardous to your health."

How did the people respond? Not only did they ignore the warning, another prophet claimed it was a false warning.

As Christians we are called upon to warn nonbelievers of judgment coming upon this world, and upon them, for sin. How do they respond?

A great many of them scoff at it and claim that if The Lord were coming to judge sin and sinners He would have gotten here by now.

Well, He **is** coming. What has prevented Him thus far is His longsuffering, meaning that He is not willing that any should perish but that all would come to eternal life. While His longsuffering waits there is opportunity to warn men and see some saved. When His longsuffering ends it will be terrible.

I'll organize my thoughts about chapter twenty-eight around two points: #1 You Warn Of Judgment Hoping God's Longsuffering Endures, and #2 You Warn Of Judgment Knowing God's Longsuffering Ends.

#1 You Warn Of Judgment
Hoping God's Longsuffering Endures
(v1-11)

"Ready or Not...
Jesus is Coming"
was the first
Christian bumper
sticker I put on a
car when I got
saved in early
1979. I've been
saying it ever

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since, going on thirty-three years - just about the same amount of time Jeremiah had been warning Judah of God's judgment.

I believe just as strongly as I did then that the Bible teaches Jesus is coming and that His coming is imminent - at any moment.

It's only discouraging that Jesus hasn't yet come to resurrect and rapture the church if we forget His longsuffering. He waits for others like us to be saved.

Jeremiah's responses in this chapter are a good spiritual role model for us to follow when we are trying to remain encouraged about the Lord's longsuffering.

Jeremiah 28:1 And it happened in the same year, at the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah king of Judah, in the fourth year and in the fifth month, that Hananiah the son of Azur the prophet, who was from Gibeon, spoke to me in the house of the LORD in the presence of the priests and of all the people, saying, Jeremiah 28:2 "Thus speaks the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, saying: 'I have broken the yoke of the king of Babylon. Jeremiah 28:3 Within two full years I will bring back to this place all the vessels of the LORD's house, that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon took away from this place and carried to Babylon. Jeremiah 28:4 And I will bring back to this place Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, with all the captives of Judah who went to Babylon,' says the LORD, 'for I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon.' "

Hananiah is called "the prophet" throughout these verses. Jeremiah doesn't call him a false prophet. His prophecy will turn out to be false but, in the mean time, he was respected by Jeremiah and by the people.

Hananiah can represent to us someone who does not rightly divide God's Word. He or she is not a false teacher but they are mishandling the Word of God.

Recently it has become popular to question whether or not there is a literal Hell. Respected, popular Bible teachers are suggesting that all nonbelievers are either saved in the end or they are annihilated as if they had never existed.

I could wish they were right but they are not. Jesus spoke more about Hell than He did Heaven. One recent author described Jesus' comments this way:

Jesus chose strong and terrifying language when He spoke of Hell. I believe He chose to speak this way because He loves us and wanted to warn us. So let's not miss the point: He spoke of Hell as a horrifying place, characterized by suffering, fire, darkness, and lamentation. I believe His intention was to stir a fear in us that would cause us to take Hell seriously and avoid it at all costs.

The Bible is dramatically clear that there is a place of torment created for the devil and his demons but where nonbelievers also will be sent for eternity.

Hananiah's problem wasn't the existence of Hell but the exercise of God's discipline. Listening to Hananiah you'd have to say that he ultimately thought that there was no need to repent from sin in order to have a right relationship with God. God's people were setting up idols, oppressing the poor, even sacrificing their children. Hananiah knew this but his message contained no rebuke, no warning, no correction. If you heard him you thought everything was going to be OK, that God would do nothing to correct His people, and you could go on your merry way with no change of heart or direction.

I don't have stats to prove it, but I think more-and-more believers are living in outright, obvious sin with no thoughts of needing to repent in order to avoid God's discipline. Sin is nothing new; but this casual attitude towards it is more prevalent. The Hananiah doctrine - that a holy God ignores your sin - is alive and well.

Jeremiah 28:5 Then the prophet Jeremiah spoke to the prophet Hananiah in the presence of the priests and in the presence of all the people who stood in the house of the LORD,
Jeremiah 28:6 and the prophet Jeremiah said, "Amen! The LORD do so; the LORD perform your words which you have prophesied, to bring back the vessels of the LORD's house and all who were carried away captive, from Babylon to this place.

I'm humbled by Jeremiah's response. I'd want to fight, argue, debate, defend myself. Why didn't Jeremiah do those things?

Although he prophesied certain judgment to come upon Judah he didn't relish it. Would to God that Judah might repent and God relent of the judgment that Jeremiah had been proclaiming. It wouldn't make Jeremiah's prophecies false any more than Nineveh's repentance made Jonah's warning false.

Jeremiah 28:7 Nevertheless hear now this word that I speak in your hearing and in the hearing of all the people:

Jeremiah 28:8 The prophets who have been before me and before you of old prophesied against many countries and great kingdoms - of war and disaster and pestilence.

Jeremiah 28:9 As for the prophet who prophesies of peace, when the word of the prophet comes to pass, the prophet will be known as one whom the LORD has truly sent."

In a very gentle apologetic Jeremiah did point out that his prophecies were consistent with those given by earlier prophets whereas Hananiah's prophecy was at odds with them.

Comparing Scripture with Scripture is always a good idea. God will not contradict Himself; He is consistent in presenting His truth.

The ultimate test of the truth of Hananiah's words would be whether or not they came to pass.

Jeremiah 28:10 Then Hananiah the prophet took the yoke off the prophet Jeremiah's neck and broke it.

Jeremiah 28:11 And Hananiah spoke in the presence of all the people, saying, "Thus says the LORD: 'Even so I will break the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon from the neck of all nations within the space of two full years.' " And the prophet Jeremiah went his way.

Again we are witness to Jeremiah's humility. He allowed Hananiah to remove the yoke and break it. Then he simply "went his way."

God's Word needs no defending. It's true no matter what others say about it. Our responsibility is to present it - all of it. We are not responsible for the results.

What we **are** responsible for is how we behave as Christians entrusted with God's Word. In Jeremiah's case it was far more powerful for him to humble himself, to let the Word speak for itself, than to mount a defense.

As we end each day, and The Lord has not come for us, may we be able to say "Amen!" to His longsuffering. Then, as we rise with new mercies every morning, may we be about our Father's business, knowing His coming for us is imminent.

Jeremiah said "Amen!" to Hananiah's prophecy. He could wish God's longsuffering would endure, giving Judah - or at least individuals in Judah - more time to repent.

As we end each day, and The Lord has not come for us, may we be able to say "Amen!" to His longsuffering. Then, as we rise with new mercies every morning, may we be about our Father's business, knowing His coming for us is imminent.

#2 You Warn Of Judgment Knowing God's Longsuffering Ends

(v12-17)

In the great passage in Second Peter that discusses God's longsuffering you come to understand that God's longsuffering must end. It ended for Sodom and Gomorrah; it ended in the days of Noah. In our own days it will end as God brings upon the earth the Great Tribulation.

Mean time we should think more of the destiny of individuals. Apart from Christ they will be lost for eternity.

Jeremiah was sent to minister to an unlikely individual.

Jeremiah 28:12 Now the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah, after Hananiah the prophet had broken the yoke from the neck of the prophet Jeremiah, saying,

Jeremiah 28:13 "Go and tell Hananiah, saying, 'Thus says the LORD: "You have broken the yokes of wood, but you have made in their place yokes of iron."

Jeremiah 28:14 For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: "I have put a yoke of iron on the neck of all these nations, that they may serve Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon; and they shall serve him. I have given him the beasts of the field also." ' "

You'd think this would have been more appropriate, and have had more impact, if Jeremiah had said it publicly at the time of Hananiah's prophecy. You'd think it would have been better for all the people to hear it, not just Hananiah.

God, being all-wise, thought otherwise. God sees hearts in ways we just can't. He divides between the soul and the spirit in a person. It's complicated, high-level stuff.

I was talking to a veteran this week who had seen duty as an explosives ordinance disposal specialist. We talked about how each device is different making diffusing or disposing of each device a little different.

The human heart is far more complex than a bomb. God deals slowly, patiently with hearts. He can't cut the red wire too soon or the whole thing will implode. So with Hananiah we must trust God knew a public rebuke would have been devastating.

We see, too, that Jeremiah was willing to take a hit if necessary. I'm sure the large crowd in the Temple that Sabbath day thought Hananiah had put Jeremiah in his place. If it was a prophetic smack-down, Hananiah looked to have won. We know better.

God requires one thing: faithfulness. Jeremiah was faithful to deliver the message God gave him. He was equally faithful to represent the heart of God. In this case that meant emphasizing that God was indeed longsuffering by saying "Amen!" and walking away.

In the end when I stand before Jesus one-on-one it won't matter what other people thought about me. I may think my life is littered with broken yokes as others seem to have gotten the upper hand, but I won't be responsible for what others did with the truth of God's Word - only for my own handling of His Word.

I cannot emphasize this enough. In almost every other area of life we look at raw results to gauge success.

The results you want to look for in your walk with The Lord are the fruit - the spiritual fruit - promised you as a believer.

Spiritual fruit is produced as you yield to The Lord, as you abide in Him the way a vine abides in a branch. The branch doesn't work hard to produce fruit. It receives from the vine as the farmer tills and cultivates and prunes it for a greater yield.

Something else that is important to realize. **You cannot produce fruit in someone else's life; only Jesus can produce spiritual fruit in a person's life.** You cannot make someone else fruitful; it's a work of the Spirit within them accomplished by their own yielding to The Lord.

You can provide an environment in which they have opportunity to receive The Lord and grow in Him but their fruitfulness (or fruitlessness) is on them.

Jeremiah 28:15 Then the prophet Jeremiah said to Hananiah the prophet, "Hear now, Hananiah, the LORD has not sent you, but you make this people trust in a lie.

Jeremiah 28:16 Therefore thus says the LORD: 'Behold, I will cast you from the face of the earth. This year you shall die, because you have taught rebellion against the LORD.' "

Jeremiah 28:17 So Hananiah the prophet died the same year in the seventh month.

By now we can read this and understand that Jeremiah would be weeping while delivering such news. This wasn't a moment to gloat at being the 'real' prophet whom God was going to vindicate. No, this was sad - extremely sad.

Hananiah was dead within the next two months. It may seem morbid (it's not) but I think we must assume that the people we encounter - all of them no matter their ages and relative health - could die at any moment. The Gospel is a warning that if they die apart from faith in Jesus Christ they have forfeited Heaven and will perish eternally in Hell, despite the so-called 'prophets' in every generation who want to erase Hell from our thinking.

Are you feeling a little like Jeremiah? You've taken a stand for The Lord but it seems as if nothing is happening; or, worse, that the things that are happening seem contrary to His Word?

Does it seem as if the Hananiah's of this age are prospering while you are being embarrassed? Like your yokes - the things you built for The Lord, at His direction - are broken at your feet?

"It ain't over til it's over." When it is over it will just be you and The Lord. Everything hidden will be revealed. It will all make sense. He will wipe away every tear. You won't care to be vindicated because you'll realize the only Person that you needed to please was Jesus; no other opinion matters but His, and He wants to say to you, "Well done!"