

# Jeremiah 28: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[ 0 : 00 ]     Jeremiah chapter 28 I will also bring back to this place Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, and all the exiles from Judah who went to Babylon, declares the Lord, for I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon.

Then the prophet Jeremiah spoke to Hananiah the prophet in the presence of the priests and all the people who were standing in the house of the Lord. And the prophet Jeremiah said, Amen. May the Lord do so. May the Lord make the words that you have prophesied come true and bring back to this place from Babylon the vessels of the house of the Lord and all the exiles.

Yet hear now this word that I speak in your hearing and in the hearing of all the people. The prophets who preceded you and me from ancient times prophesied war, famine, and pestilence against many countries and great kingdoms.

As for the prophet who prophesies peace, when the word of that prophet comes to pass, then it will be known that the Lord has truly sent the prophet. Then the prophet Hananiah took the yoke bars from the neck of Jeremiah the prophet and broke them.

And Hananiah spoke in the presence of all the people, saying, Thus says the Lord, even so will I break the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon from the neck of all the nations within two years.

[ 1 : 41 ]     But Jeremiah the prophet went his way. Sometime after the prophet Hananiah had broken the yoke bars from off the neck of Jeremiah the prophet, the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah, Go, tell Hananiah, thus says the Lord, You have broken wooden bars, but you have made in their place bars of iron.

For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, I have put upon the neck of all these nations an iron yoke to serve Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and they shall serve him, for I have given to him even the beasts of the field.

And Jeremiah the prophet said to the prophet Hananiah, Listen, Hananiah, the Lord has not sent you, and you have made this people trust in a lie. Therefore thus says the Lord, Behold, I will remove you from the face of the earth.

This year you shall die, because you have uttered rebellion against the Lord. In that same year, in the seventh month, the prophet Hananiah died. In chapter 27, Jeremiah had delivered a message to Zedekiah the king of Judah, and to the kings of Edom, Moab, Ammon, and also Tyre and Sidon.

Warning them not to rebel against the king of Babylon, he told them to accept the yoke of the king of Babylon, that they would serve the king of Babylon, and after a time, that the Lord would judge the king of Babylon, and they would be released.

[ 2 : 58 ]     However, if they failed to obey the word of the Lord, they would suffer famine, sword, and pestilence. Jeremiah's message had conflicted with that of the establishment prophets. Those prophets had told the leaders that the treasures of the temple that had been taken by Nebuchadnezzar would be brought back.

Jeremiah, speaking by the word of the Lord, insisted that this was a vain hope. Indeed, what they had left in the temple would be taken from them. The events of Jeremiah chapter 28 occur shortly afterwards.

In this chapter, rather than speaking generically about the false prophets and their message, Jeremiah has a confrontation with a specific false prophet, Hananiah the son of Azar. Jeremiah's message, which was accompanied by the symbolic action of wearing yoke bars and straps, concerned the yoke of the king of Babylon.

Hananiah claims that he is declaring the word of the Lord, and he addresses his message quite specifically to Jeremiah, opposing him publicly in the house of the Lord. Here Hananiah is a direct adversary of Jeremiah, challenging both his legitimacy and the truth of his message.

Back in Jeremiah chapter 1, when the Lord had first called Jeremiah, he had promised to be with him against all of his enemies. In verses 17 to 19, But you, dress yourself for work, arise and say to them everything that I command you.

[ 4 : 14 ] Do not be dismayed by them, lest I dismay you before them. And I, behold, I make you this day a fortified city, an iron pillar and bronze walls, against the whole land, against the kings of Judah, its officials, its priests, and the people of the land.

They will fight against you, but they shall not prevail against you, for I am with you, declares the Lord, to deliver you. Hananiah, whose name means the Lord is gracious, delivers a message declaring that the Lord has broken the yoke of the king of Babylon.

And within two years, all of the vessels that have been taken away with Jeconiah will be brought back. Along with Jeconiah, he will be re-established as king of Judah, and all of the exiles will be returned.

Various commentators imagine Hananiah seeing himself as standing within the tradition of someone like Isaiah. Isaiah had prophesied the deliverance of Jerusalem from the army of Sennacherib, and it had been delivered miraculously in 701 BC.

Perhaps he also sees himself as drawing upon the Davidic covenant and its unconditional promises concerning the establishment of the throne of David. Surely the Lord could never destroy the city of David, the temple, and the kingdom of Secure.

[ 5 : 24 ] Whatever setbacks they experience must be brief in duration. This is a direct provocation to Jeremiah. It is a direct attempt to delegitimize his entire mission and message.

The fact that he does not respond angrily in self-defense probably testifies to his confidence that the Lord is on his side. However many opponents might rise against him, however general the rejection of him might be among the people, the Lord is standing by his words that he has put in Jeremiah's mouth.

He will not allow them to fall to the ground, and he will vindicate his prophet in due time. Jeremiah's response to Hananiah is probably tinged with irony or sarcasm. Indeed, it would be marvelous if the Lord brought everything that Hananiah said to pass, but it is a false hope.

Ultimately, it all rests upon hollow words, and beneath that still it rests upon a vision of God that is not in fact true. Trusting in the Lord and proclaiming grand things in his name is absolutely worthless if you are not believing in the true God, if you are not acquainted with his character and not attending to his actual words.

In such a case, you are just relating to a projection of man's fancies. This is the tragic situation that the prophets of Judah now found themselves in. They were speaking about a God that was grand and gracious, but yet was not the real God at all.

[ 6 : 42 ] The real God had not spoken the words that they were speaking. The real God was not of the character that they were suggesting. Theirs was a safe, tame God, a house-trained deity for the temple of Jerusalem.

Jeremiah responds not with anger and defensiveness, but with a pointed question to Hananiah. Jeremiah stands in a tradition of prophets who prosecuted the covenant, who proclaimed war, famine, and pestilence against countries and kingdoms.

Their message was not the comforting message of peace. It was the challenging message of the covenant. If you are not faithful to the covenant, its curses will fall upon the land. Yet in the mouths of Hananiah and the other prophets, the warnings of the covenant seemed to have been utterly eclipsed by this message of constant peace and reassurance.

As their God did not seem to be a God that brought judgment, their message stood in quite stark opposition to those prophets that preceded them, that were recognized as true prophets of the Lord.

In the law, in Deuteronomy chapter 18, verses 21 to 22, the instruction was given to Israel concerning the words of prophets. And if you say in your heart, how may we know the word that the Lord has not spoken?

[ 7 : 52 ] When a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word that the Lord has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously.

You need not be afraid of him. Jeremiah applies this principle to Hananiah. If the word that he has pronounced indeed comes to pass, then it will be apparent that the Lord has in fact sent him.

But if it does not, it will be clear that he has run without being sent. Hananiah, however, reaffirms his statement. The prophet Jeremiah was wearing the yoke that symbolized his prophecy, and Hananiah takes the yoke and breaks it.

He repeats his prophecy and goes further by declaring that all of the nations that have been under the king of Babylon will be released within two years. The basis upon which Hananiah comes up with his false prophecy, whether this is delivered to him by some false source, or whether it is something that he comes up with out of his own sense of how things are going, we don't know.

But Jeremiah responds by not responding. He walks away. When the time comes, the Lord will vindicate him. While Jeremiah may be vindicated in the longer term future, the presence of such false prophets makes policy very difficult in the immediate term.

[ 9 : 03 ] How is Zedekiah to determine which of Jeremiah or Hananiah is speaking the truth? If he follows Jeremiah's encouragement to pay attention to the prophecies of the previous prophets and think about their underlying theology, then he will have a clue.

But the presence of conflicting messengers is part of the judgment upon the people of God. A similar situation is seen in 1 Kings chapter 22, when the Lord puts a lying spirit in the mouths of Ahab's prophets.

This introduces confusion, feeds people's delusions, and also in the process reveals people's greater appetite for the lie. In our own day, when there are many competing voices claiming to be speaking the word of the Lord, we may be experiencing a similar judgment.

Sometime later, the word of the Lord comes to Jeremiah and he is sent with a message for Hananiah in particular. Hananiah has broken wooden bars, but in their place would be bars of iron.

In resisting the yoke of Babylon, he has resisted the word of the Lord, and the yoke of Babylon would be all the harder as a result of it. Indeed, the creator of all of the earth, the Lord God of Israel, has established Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon as if a new Adam.

[10:11] He has been given even the beasts of the field to rule over. Jeremiah declares decisively that Hananiah has not been sent by the Lord. Indeed, he has made the people trust in a lie.

As the Lord has not sent him, the Lord will remove him, or literally send him, from the face of the earth. He will die that very year. And a few months later, the word of Jeremiah is vindicated as Hananiah dies.

The people won't actually have to wait for two years to determine which is the true prophet. This is another example of the Lord fulfilling the promise that he made to Jeremiah back in chapter 1.

A question to consider. What are some of the principles that we can apply to test the words that people are bringing in the name of the Lord in a similar way as Jeremiah suggests to Hananiah?

