

Jeremiah 27-28 • When the False Prophet Meets the True

Introduction

What is the role of a prophet? What makes them different from, say, a preacher or teacher or evangelist? In these chapters we have the opportunity to examine a true prophet of God side-by-side with a false prophet. We are provided not with just a case study of how to tell the true apart from the false, but with how we as believers are supposed to handle prophesy and react to God's prophets. In this example we can see why true prophets are often called "evangelists to believers".

¹In the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah the son of Josiah, king of Judah, this word came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying— ²thus says the LORD to me—"Make for yourself bonds and yokes and put them on your neck,

³and send word to the king of Edom, to the king of Moab, to the king of the sons of Ammon, to the king of Tyre and to the king of Sidon by the messengers who come to Jerusalem to Zedekiah king of Judah. ⁴Command them to go to their masters, saying, 'Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, thus you shall say to your masters, ⁵I have made the earth, the men and the beasts which are on the face of the earth by My great power and by My outstretched arm, and I will give it to the one who is pleasing in My sight. ⁶Now I have given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, My servant, and I have given him also the wild animals of the field to serve him. ⁷All the nations shall serve him and his son and his grandson until the time of his own land comes; then many nations and great kings will make him their servant.

⁸"It will be, that the nation or the kingdom which will not serve him, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and which will not put its neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon, I will punish that nation with the sword, with famine and with pestilence," declares the LORD, "until I have destroyed it by his hand. ⁹But as for you, do not listen to your prophets, your diviners, your dreamers, your soothsayers or your sorcerers who speak to you, saying, 'You will not serve the king of Babylon.' ¹⁰For they prophesy a lie to you in order to remove you far from your land; and I will drive you out and you will perish. ¹¹But the nation

[Read 27:1-2]

Q: What kind of a teaching is this?

A: This is what we would call an object lesson. Jeremiah would do something that visibly parallels the greater symbolism of the Word of God.

[Read 27:3-7]

Q: What is the meaning of the object lesson?

A: It symbolizes the nations who will fall victim to Nebuchadnezzar initially and remain subservient to Babylon through the reigns of his son and grandson.

Q: Why are these particular nations singled out?

A: These are the nations to whom the cup of God's wrath was sent through Jeremiah in chapter 25 and against whom Jeremiah prophesied.

Q: Are these the only nations to be conquered by Babylon?

A: Verse 7 indicates, "All the nations shall serve him". But God wants these nations in particular to know in advance that the greater work of His judgment is empowering these things and that it's not simply coming about by chance. These are all nations He has given the opportunity to come into a right relationship with Him at one time or another.

Q: What might be significant about how God indicates the length of time Babylon will rule?

A: The time of God's judgment is fixed and in the end itself turns upon the instrument of that judgment – Babylon – who does not learn the right lesson of judgment.

[Read 27:8-11]

Q: What is God's desire? What will happen to those who ignore it?

A: God's desire is that they submit to judgment. But if they resist it, He will send additional, supernatural events to add to their punishment.

Q: What will happen to those who accept it?

A: They will be subject to Babylon but will not be extracted from their land. (v.11)

Q: What does this tell us about God's intentions?

A: He is disciplining them for the purpose of changing their behavior. He is seeking those who will submit to His discipline, not continue to rebel against it.

which will bring its neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon and serve him, I will let remain on its land,” declares the LORD, “and they will till it and dwell in it.””

Q: Whom does God identify as their greatest threat in this situation?

A: “...your prophets, your diviners, your dreamers, your soothsayers or your sorcerers”. (v.9)

1. “Prophet” – Someone who is purportedly conveying a message from God.
2. “Diviner” – Someone who claims that their magic practices or incantations reveal a message from beyond. Their message is purported to come about as the result of the person’s own works.
3. “Dreamer” – Someone who claims to have had a divine revelation or prophetic vision as the result of a dream from God.
4. “Soothsayer” – Someone who claims they can predict the future by magical or mystical means, a kind of practitioner of false religious practices.
5. “Sorcerer” – Someone who practices magic, something that may or may not be directly connected with a particular religion.. Examples are Jannes and Jambres, the witch of Endor, and Simon the Samaritan (Acts 8).

All of these different disciplines cover all the ways by which people believe spiritual results could be achieved **WITHOUT** going through the One True God.

Point: One of the ways people rebel against God is by seeking false spiritual authorities to tell them what they **want** to hear rather than the truth. The greater problem here is with people who will listen to every spiritual deceiver of every kind but not to the Word of God.

¹²I spoke words like all these to Zedekiah king of Judah, saying, “Bring your necks under the yoke of the king of Babylon and serve him and his people, and live! ¹³Why will you die, you and your people, by the sword, famine and pestilence, as the LORD has spoken to that nation which will not serve the king of Babylon? ¹⁴So do not listen to the words of the prophets who speak to you, saying, ‘You will not serve the king of Babylon,’ for they prophesy a lie to you; ¹⁵for I have not sent them,” declares the LORD, “but they prophesy falsely in My name, in order that I may drive you out and that you may perish, you and the prophets who prophesy to you.”

[Read 27:12-15]

Q: Now to whom is God speaking?

A: To Judah.

Q: Does He say anything different to them than to the nations?

A: No, it’s the same call.

Q: And what is their biggest spiritual impediment?

A: Prophets who “*prophesy a lie to you...they prophesy falsely in My name*”. Just as false spiritual influences are the main problem with the nations, so it is with Judah.

Q: What is the consequence of listening to false prophets?

A: It’s not merely that someone is getting bad information, but since it does not change behavior it leads to death.

Application: The difference between putting into practice God’s Word and ways as opposed to listening to false spiritual influences is literally the difference between life and death itself.

¹⁶Then I spoke to the priests and to all this people, saying, “Thus says the LORD: Do not listen to the words of your prophets who prophesy to you, saying, ‘Behold, the vessels of the LORD’S house will now shortly be brought again from Babylon’; for they are prophesying a lie to you. ¹⁷Do not listen to them; serve the king of Babylon, and live! Why should this city become a ruin? ¹⁸But if they are prophets, and if the word of the LORD is with them, let them now entreat the LORD of hosts that the vessels which are left in the house of the LORD, in the house of the king of Judah and in Jerusalem may not go to Babylon. ¹⁹For thus says the Lord of hosts concerning the pillars, concerning the sea, concerning the stands and concerning the rest of the vessels that are left in this city, ²⁰which Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon did not take when he carried into exile Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, from Jerusalem to Babylon, and all the nobles of Judah and Jerusalem. ²¹Yes, thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, concerning the vessels that are left in the house of the LORD and in the house of the king of Judah and in Jerusalem, ²²‘They will be carried to Babylon and they will be there until the day I visit them,’ declares the LORD. ‘Then I will bring them back and restore them to this place.’”

¹Now in the same year, in the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah king of Judah, in the fourth year, in the fifth month, Hananiah the son of Azzur, the prophet, who was from Gibeon, spoke to me in the house of the LORD in the presence of the priests and all the people, saying, ²“Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, ‘I have broken the yoke of the king of Babylon. ³Within two years I am going to bring back to this place all the vessels of the LORD’S house, which Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon took away from this place and carried to Babylon. ⁴I am also going to bring back

[Read 27:16-22]

Q: Why are “the vessels of the Lord’s house” being discussed?

A: Previously the most costly and precious vessels had been removed during the reigns of Jehoiakim and Jeconiah. This was a warning, a kind of prelude from God indicating that everything would eventually be taken. Instead of repenting and learning the right lesson, they instead clung to the notion that it was something temporary, a false belief reinforced by false prophets.

Q: Why should this be such a big issue to the people of that day?

A: They had a false belief that God would never give His temple over to a Gentile nation much less allow it to be destroyed. They came to believe that the temple itself was their protection replacing their need to be obedient from the heart and that religious things would automatically protect them. So listening to false prophecies about the temple vessels coming back reinforced their wrong behavior.

Q: What is v.18 really stating about the false prophets?

A: That whether they are true or false prophets will be proven by what happens to the things of the temple.

Q: What is significant about the things mentioned in v.19?

A: These are the large, main items in the outer temple necessary for carrying out the actual sacrifices, not merely the smaller “vessels” by which the sacrifices were carried out. In other words, it wasn’t that the temple rituals would be hindered a little bit by removing the vessels, but that they would be impossible to carry out when everything in the temple was carried away or destroyed. (See Jer. 52:17, 20 & 21 when this ultimately happened.)

Q: How does their slavery to Babylon represent something greater?

A: Their physical slavery to another will mirror their spiritual slavery because they will not be able to carry out the full letter of the Law as provided through Moses when they no longer have a functioning Temple. Just as they can no longer serve their own king but must serve another, so they can no longer properly serve and worship their heavenly King.

Application: *When the things of God are continually misused they are withdrawn by God so that He can place the focus squarely on the heart.*

[Read 28:1-4]

Q: Was Hananiah a prophet?

A: No, it only says that his father Azzur was acknowledged as a prophet from Gibeon.

Point: *False prophets often count on their associations with true prophets to disguise their true nature and cause people to wrongly call them “prophet”.*

Q: What is similar about Hananiah’s prophecy as compared to Jeremiah’s?

A: Using the same symbols, Hananiah predicts the exact opposite of Jeremiah.

to this place Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, and all the exiles of Judah who went to Babylon,' declares the LORD, 'for I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon.'"

Q: What does Hananiah prophesy that was not covered by Jeremiah?

A: Hananiah goes further by stating that not only would the vessels be returned, but the people who were initially taken into captivity would also be returned.

Q: How does this directly contradict what we have already discussed as the greater reason for God's message through Jeremiah?

A: The greater message is that God is going to make their physical condition mirror their spiritual condition in order to draw them back to the issue of their heart. What Hananiah is essentially preaching is that there is no need to repent or change their heart.

Application: *The true role of a biblical prophet is to call God's backslidden people back into a right spiritual relationship with Him. Therefore the true working of a false prophet is to persuade God's backslidden people that there is no need to repent or reconcile spiritually.*

[Read 28:5-9]

⁵Then the prophet Jeremiah spoke to the prophet Hananiah in the presence of the priests and in the presence of all the people who were standing in the house of the Lord, ⁶and the prophet Jeremiah said, "Amen! May the LORD do so; may the LORD confirm your words which you have prophesied to bring back the vessels of the LORD'S house and all the exiles, from Babylon to this place. ⁷Yet hear now this word which I am about to speak in your hearing and in the hearing of all the people! ⁸The prophets who were before me and before you from ancient times prophesied against many lands and against great kingdoms, of war and of calamity and of pestilence. ⁹The prophet who prophesies of peace, when the word of the prophet comes to pass, then that prophet will be known as one whom the LORD has truly sent."

Q: What is the first and foremost thing Jeremiah did where Hananiah was concerned?

A: Jeremiah confronted Hananiah publicly not just in the presence of the priests, but all the people present.

Point: *When confronted publicly, false prophets and those not properly understanding Scripture will often claim a violation of Matthew 18:15-20 saying that they're not supposed to be confronted publicly until they're first approached privately. This is only true in the case of personal sin occurring specifically between individuals. In every case of those teaching false doctrine or prophesying falsely, there is no biblical "right of privacy" as outlined in Matthew 18, but the repeated biblical example is to immediately effect a public confrontation of the truth.*

Q: In the end, how is a prophet proven to be true or false?

A: "...when the word of the prophet comes to pass". (v.9) Jeremiah is saying that it's not whether a prophet's message is pleasing or not, but whether the actual events predicted come about.

Q: But what is the problem in the interim until the event comes to pass proving which prophet is true?

A: They have opposing messages as to what to do. Whereas the true prophet is calling for repentance and return, the false is claiming nothing is wrong nor needing to be addressed. The spiritually undiscerning will only find out the truth when it is too late.

Application: *False prophets often confuse the issue by turning the true message of God around to mean its exact opposite. Faith-Prosperity teachers assert we are to be rich in this life, when the Bible teaches our riches are to come in the next; Kingdom Now theology teaches there is no literal Millennial Reign to come, that it will instead be experienced in the course of this life; Replacementists teach that Israel has been replaced by the Church and there is no longer any use for literal Israel when Scripture still holds many unfulfilled promises yet to come for the nation of Israel. False prophets love to take biblical teachings and bend them 180 degrees.*

¹⁰Then Hananiah the prophet took the yoke from the neck of Jeremiah the prophet and broke it. ¹¹Hananiah spoke in the presence of all the people, saying, “Thus says the LORD, ‘Even so will I break within two full years the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon from the neck of all the nations.’” Then the prophet Jeremiah went his way.

[Read 28:10-11]

Q: Why do you suppose at this point that Jeremiah silently “went his way”?

*“When a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.
Deuteronomy 18:22*

Having spoken in the Lord’s name, and having rebutted Hananiah in the Lord’s name, the only thing that is going to settle the issue is whether or not one or the other’s words come true. This is also probably an Old Testament application of Christ’s admonition...

*“Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.
Matthew 7:6*

But it’s also worth noting that having provided God’s initial response, he goes no further until receiving an additional message from God as provided in the following verses.

¹²The word of the LORD came to Jeremiah after Hananiah the prophet had broken the yoke from off the neck of the prophet Jeremiah, saying, ¹³“Go and speak to Hananiah, saying, ‘Thus says the LORD, “You have broken the yokes of wood, but you have made instead of them yokes of iron.”’ ¹⁴For 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 will serve him. And I have also given him the beasts of the field.””

[Read 28:12-17]

Q: Why does God make the distinction between “yokes of wood” and “yokes of iron”?

A: If they had responded to the true message through Jeremiah they would have repented and their punishment under Babylon would have been much more bearable. But now their rebellion means that because they won’t submit to God’s discipline, their punishment will be so much more severe.

Application: *There are consequences for sin which often cannot be avoided but can be endured differently depending on how the heart responds.*

Q: So is the worst thing a false prophet can do is to falsely predict the future?

A: No, the worst thing they do is to deceive the heart. Their false predictions for the future are not just a trap of deception that will come about later, but actually take effect in the here and now.

¹⁵Then Jeremiah the prophet said to Hananiah the prophet, “Listen now, Hananiah, the LORD has not sent you, and you have made this people trust in a lie. ¹⁶Therefore thus says the LORD, ‘Behold, I am about to remove you from the face of the earth. This year you are going to die, because you have counseled rebellion against the LORD.’”

Q: Is the work of a false prophet simply to make people “trust in a lie”?

A: The ultimate work is in what trusting in a lie results in: “*you have counseled rebellion against the LORD*”. (v.16) It’s not believing in the lie that the vessels or people would be returned within two years that’s the most devastating spiritually, it’s the fact that this lie encouraged everyone to continue to live the same without making any behavioral change whatsoever. In other words, to continue in their rebellion of God’s Word and ways in favor of their own desires.

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

Application: *One of the ways we can know for sure that a false prophet is at work is in the fact that their adherents do not change according to God’s Word and ways but seek to justify and continue their own earthly and fleshly ways.*

Q: Have we ever seen God strike down a false prophet?

A: Throughout history, and even in our present time, it's interesting to note how personal tragedy has struck false prophets and yet most of those deceived by them refuse to learn to take it as a warning of the ultimate fall of all the lies to come.

Overall Application

*Many people believe that a prophet is someone who predicts a specific event before it comes to pass. In reality, a true prophet is someone who is calling God's backslidden people back into a right relationship with Him. The event the prophet predicts is most often a milestone when time runs out, when it will be too late to effectually repent and return to God. To properly listen to a true prophet of God is to respond to their message in the here and now before it is too late to do anything about it. This is the application of the myriad of prophecies concerning the Last Days. We don't want to see it come true and **THEN** turn to God because by that time it will be too late. The opportunity to respond is in the time **BEFORE** such things come to pass.*