

Jeremiah (pt. 2)

Judging between prophets

“Do not listen to the words of the prophets who are prophesying to you.
They are leading you into futility; they speak a vision of their own
imagination, not from the mouth of the LORD.” -- JER.23:16

Chapters 22-23

12. Despite his pain, Jeremiah accused as traitor (counselled submission to Babylon)

13. But Israel couldn't deny prophecies VINDICATED Jeremiah (22:11-16)
How is Josiah contrasted with new leaders? (vv.13,16)

Jeremiah condemns the king's callous exploitation of his workers in defiance of the Torah (Lv. 19:13; Dt. 24:14). [Harrison 117]

14. (23:15-40) What are the sins of the FALSE PROPHETS?

“They say still,” the participle with the absolute infinitive intensifies the ceaseless flow of words, whereby they seek to cover up their windy vanities and to impress and overwhelm their victims ... They “run,” hurry with unbecoming eagerness to assume the prophetic office, without My sanction! How unlike God's prophets! (Ex.3:11; 4:1ff.; Amos 7:14-15; Is. 6:1-8; Jer. 1:1-15) [Laetsch pp 198,199]

Blasphemy and trusting men: Rutherford judged out of his own mouth

‘The crime of blasphemy is the doing of any thing or act or uttering speech that brings reproach upon the name of God and upon his Christ’ PROHIBITION AND THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS (1930) p.42

‘Jehovah never makes any mistakes. Where the student relies upon men, he is certain to be led into difficulties. When he relies upon the Lord, he will be kept in perfect peace.’ PROPHECY pp.67,68

A. SUBSTITUTED ‘new truth’ for divine revelation (vv.16,21,25-28)

Absolute loyalty and obedience to the revealed will and word of the Lord was the ultimate criterion for distinguishing between ... prophets. [Harrison 123]

The false prophets report a vision of their own hearts, that is, a self-induced vision, something that originated in their own minds. They did not “wait upon the Lord”; rather their own understanding of God and of his relationship to the nation was their sole source of information. It was not from the mouth of Yahweh ... The verb deluding (mahbilim) is related to the noun hebel which features prominently in Ecclesiastes: “Vanity (hebel), vanity, all is vanity,” that is, “emptiness” or “wind.” The false prophets were thus declared to be “a bag of wind.” [Thompson 497]

And if a prophet has My Word, let him speak My Word faithfully, literally, as truth, just as it has been given to him, without alteration, without changing its sense in the least. How dare man mingle the chaff of his own dreams into the pure wheat of the word of the omnipresent, omniscient Lord Jehovah in order to find more ready and willing hearers! And let every preacher of My Word, and everyone professing to be a spokesman of the Lord, guard against adding his own views and opinions to My Word! [Laetsch p 201]

B. PERVERTED words of the Lord (v.36)

Like straw their idle dreams lack sustenance, whereas the prophetic word, like wheat, nourishes its recipients ... False prophets ... perverted the divine words by making it appear ludicrous. [Harrison 122,123]

C. DELUDED people through false hopes (v.32)

How true to life is this picture of false prophets peddling their dreams, their fantastic ideas, their delusions, from door to door with a zeal worthy of a better cause. [Laetsch p 200]

D. REDUCED Jehovah to likeness of demon gods - not omnipresent, nor omniscient (vv.23,24)

In these verses name (sem) refers to the essential character of Yahweh, that is, who he is (cf. Exod. 3:13-14; Isa. 9:6; etc). Once men forgot the character of Yahweh they could be persuaded to accept all kinds of doctrines. This had happened to the ancestors of Jeremiah's generation. As a result they accepted the pagan beliefs about Baal. It was important not to forget (sakah), but to remember and to call to mind the character of Yahweh. [Thompson 501]

God is not like the gods of the heathen, a local god, confined to his shrine, his temple, whom one can approach at will, whose plans one can learn by approaching him and gaining his favor; a god whose knowledge is ... limited ... He is rather a God afar off, dwelling where no man can approach Him; His vision and knowledge embrace all things happening in the world, past, present, and future ... He is One that filleth heaven and earth, omnipresent, closer to every being than the skin is to our flesh, as far remote at the same time as the most distant star; and He is that because He is Jehovah. Three times He calls attention to this name ... He is “I Am,” unlimited by space and time, absolutely self-determining, subject to no one's beck and call, responsible to no authority, of unlimited power and wisdom, the one and only Jehovah. [Laetsch pp 199-200]

E. PROFANED the NAME, attaching it to falsehood, occult (vv.26,27)

Jeremiah's heart is filled with indignation against prophets that dishonor the Lord and His holy Word by placing their word on a level with God's, palming off the dreams of their deceitful and wicked heart as the oracles of the God of truth. [Laetsch p 197]

Chapters 26-28

A test case: HANANIAH

1. (26:1-9) If you're going to take shots, show up personally

The passage gives a glimpse into legal proceedings and brings before us significant groups of people – the prosecutors, priests and prophets, the judges, princes (or civil authorities), elders, and the accused man, Procedures take place at the gate to Yahweh's house, and there is prosecution and defense ... Jeremiah conducted his own defense. [Laetsch p 523]

2. (26:10-15) Note they didn't READ Jeremiah's uncompromising denunciations

The Lord particularly warns him not to diminish a single word, the only time this warning is recorded. The Lord knows that this errand would be an especially dangerous one. The protection of pious Josiah was no longer available; he would feel for the first time the full force of public persecution. At such a time Jeremiah might be tempted to omit or tone down some of the sternest condemnations ... Jeremiah is given an opportunity to defend himself ... And he was too well known to all as a prophet of the Lord to admit of any possibility of refuting his claim. For the past twenty years he had been publicly acknowledged as God's spokesman. [Laetsch p 217-220]

3. (26:16-19) Even Jeremiah's critics saw CONTINUITY (e.g. with Micah's message)

The emphasis here is that Yahweh makes his will known through the ministry of true prophets – my servants the prophets. These Yahweh kept sending with great urgency, or "persistence" (lit. "Rising early and sending"). The group of chapters (27-29) will demonstrate the profound contrast between a true prophet and a false prophet. [Thompson p 524]

4. (26:20-24) The consequence of 'in your face' faith (contrast Urijah)

Fortunately for Jeremiah he had the friendly support of men like Ahikam ben Shaphan. Shaphan was the scribe (RSV "secretary") of Josiah's reform (2 K. 22:3-14). Jeremiah seems to have had good relations with this family. Another son Gemariah urged Jehoiakim not to burn Jeremiah's scroll (36:10,25), and a third son Gedaliah took charge of Jeremiah after the fall of Jerusalem (39:14; 40:5-16). The support of such a family saved Jeremiah's life. The friendly relations which existed between them and Jeremiah suggest that Jeremiah had a positive and sympathetic attitude to Josiah's reform and to his general policy. [Thompson p 528]

5. (27:9-15) The SURE SIGN of a false prophet (Draw JW's attention to 'living hope' of Jeremiah: SUBMISSION to God -ordained authorities -- false prophets counselled rebellion; thus 'persecution' own fault)

To resist Nebuchadnezzar was to resist Yahweh, and that could only result in one's own destruction. Like

Isaiah his predecessor, who set a time limit for the Assyrians (Isa. 10:5-12) which would end when they had fulfilled the purposes of Yahweh, Jeremiah strictly limited the commission of Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar was Yahweh's servant, and as long as he was needed he was irresistible. His service was confined to the destruction of the things in which Israel was placing a false confidence. [Thompson p 534]

6. (27:16-22) How can you tell LIE if fulfilment still future? (no CONTINUITY; cf.25:11-13) False prophets 'play to crowd' (v.16) – – who of us DOESN'T want his cake now?

7. (28:1-5) Jeremiah unafraid of CONFRONTING CRITICS (as was Hananiah!) – – even apostates!

Perhaps on some Sabbath or festival day when the Temple court was crowded with people. Jeremiah also came to the Temple, wearing the symbol of subjection to Nebuchadnezzar ... We can imagine the enthusiasm bordering on fanaticism that swept through the vast audience, the thunderous applause, the joyous shouts that echoed through the spacious court at this oracle so positively and so publicly proclaimed as the very word of the Lord of Hosts. [Laetsch p 226]

8. (28:6) But still AFFIRM & AGREE where you can (bridge-building even with apostates!)

Like an iron pillar he stands alone in that howling mob and speaks, speaks boldly, courageously, but wisely. He does not thunder forth the Law. He does not break out in violent denunciation of the false prophet. No! "Amen!" he says. [Laetsch p 227]

9. (28:7-9) Still, Jeremiah emphasizes CONTINUITY ... (and the ultimate test of the prophet's authority)

Jeremiah here sets up another mark of a true prophet. His prophecies have to be fulfilled (23:16-40; cf. Deut. 18:21-22). There was a strong argument against the possibility of Hananiah's prophecy being fulfilled. When he announced imminent prosperity and well-being (salom) for the nation he spoke in a manner contrary to all the great prophets who had preceded him and Jeremiah. Their message was always one of doom – war, disaster, and pestilence. If now Hananiah's prophecy, which was the very opposite of the message of the past prophets, proved to be true, he would establish himself as a true prophet of Yahweh. [Thompson p539-40]

10. (28:10-17) Jehovah CONFIRMS true prophet (by short-range fulfilment)

There is no indication of how he died. It may have been by some natural cause such as illness. But whatever the means, Jeremiah's status as a true prophet was vindicated (cf. vv. 5-7). He who predicted deliverance in two years (v.3) died in two months. It was a telling authentication of Jeremiah's position as a true prophet. [Thompson p 541]

What is Hananiah guilty of?

He is called "Hannaniah the prophet" because that was his official title. He was a prophet not by the will and call of God, but was by his own choice a member of a profession that had usurped the name and honor which the Lord gave to those only whom He had prepared and ordained prophets (ch. 1:5). This self-styled prophet was revealed to be what Jeremiah had called him, a teacher of lies (v.15) and of rebellion against the Lord (v.16), guilty of a capital crime, while Jeremiah stood acknowledged by the Lord as His chosen spokesman. [Laetsch p 229]