

Divide-The-Truth Sunday School Preview Notes
Jeremiah 28
Sunday School Lesson for April 17, 2005

Introduction: Chapters 27 and 28 are very much alike. Both chapters continue the prophecy of the yokes. Both chapters treat the future Babylonian captivity as a yoke. A yoke was the instrument used to keep oxen under control. It always speaks of submission. As strange as it may seem, Jeremiah was sent by God to tell Judah to give up. He was sent to tell the nation not to fight, or resist but to give up peaceably to the Babylonians. A century earlier Isaiah told them to fight, but now it was time to concede. God had given up on His people. They had refused time and time again His calling of repentance; therefore, He rose up the gentile nation of Babylon to enforce justice against His people. Judah and Israel would have power and dominion over the entire world, only if they remained loyal to their God. God told them, through Jeremiah, to surrender because they had succumbed to sin.

Following the death of King Josiah, Judah took a downward plunge. Not one of the remaining kings attempted to walk with God. In fact, the Bible tells us that they all “walked in the sins of their fathers.” Chapter 28 opens with a time line at the “beginning of the reign of Zedekiah king of Judah.” Zedekiah was not the immediate replacement for Josiah after his death. There were two kings that immediately followed Josiah, Jehoahaz who reigned for only three months and Jehoiakim who reigned 11 years. After Jehoiakim was deported to Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar replaced him with his uncle Zedekiah. He reigned for 11 years also. Zedekiah hated the Babylonians and therefore sought the help of Egypt. Israel may have physically gotten out of Egypt but Egypt never left Israel’s heart. The Egyptians were defeated by the Babylonians and Babylon then turned her attention to Judah. After 18 months of attacks, the walls of Jerusalem were broken and Jerusalem was destroyed. Many were killed and the rest were taken into captivity. A few were left behind. The city was left in rubble.

1 Not long after Zedekiah became king, God told Jeremiah to build a wooden yoke and wear it. It was a vivid reminder of Judah’s submission to Babylonian captivity. In chapter 27 Jeremiah spoke the message of submission to the nations. He spoke to the leaders to inform them that clever strategies and political maneuvers, and changes in policies would not prevent God’s judgment from occurring (vv.1-11). Once Jeremiah finished delivering his message to the leaders of surrounding nations, he then delivered his message to King Zedekiah (vv.12-15) and then to the priest and people (vv.16-22). To each group of people his message was the same, “Do not listen to the words of your prophets for they speak lies. They prophesy peace but there will be no peace. They prophesy victory, but there will be no victory.” His message was clear. No one was left out of the judgment.

Chapter 28 opens with one of those false prophets that Jeremiah warned about in chapter 27. His name was Hananiah. Very little is known about this man other than who his father was and where he was from. However, we see him speaking as a true prophet in the most central location for prophets to speak; “in the house of the LORD, in the presence of the priests and all the people.”

2 Not only did he speak in the most central location but he also spoke using the vocabulary of the true prophets of God, “Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel...” This was the same introductory formula that Jeremiah and many other prophets of God used. Thus, Hananiah was claiming the same inspiration as Jeremiah in his message.

Class Interaction:

- What was his message?

Answer: “I (God) have broken the yoke of the king of Babylon.”

- Now look back at 27:1-7. What was Jeremiah’s message to the kings and rulers of nations?
- Now look at 27:12. What was Jeremiah’s message to King Zedekiah?
- Now look at 27:16-17. What was Jeremiah’s message to the priests and people?

Jeremiah said give up for Babylon will defeat you. Hananiah said fight, for God has defeated Babylon. Jeremiah was pronouncing judgment. Hananiah was pronouncing peace. Hananiah's message was in direct opposition to Jeremiah's message. Hananiah's message was in direct opposition to the yoke that Jeremiah was wearing as he preached.

- Who do you think the people chose to listen to?
- Who do they listen to today?

We live in a world today that prefers to hear a favorable lie instead of unfavorable truth. The sadness is that the truth is what sets you free.

3-4 Not only did Hananiah's word contradict Jeremiah's, but he also predicted that some very specific events would transpire. Jeremiah had told them that nothing in Jerusalem would be left and the people would never return. Hananiah, however, contradicted Jeremiah and told the people that all the things taken ("all the vessels of the LORD's house") and the people taken ("Jeconiah... with all the captives of Judah") would be restored. He even gave a timetable of "two full years." Hananiah was probably aware that at the time of his prediction Nebuchadnezzar was occupied with a revolt in his own kingdom. Because of this revolt, he had to focus his attention on his own kingdom and let things be in Judah. When Hananiah spoke these words, things did not seem as bad as Jeremiah had made them out to be. Naturally the people would prefer to hear his words over some lunatic wearing a yoke. Naturally they wanted to hear about victory and freedom rather than defeat. Naturally they liked to hear messages that appealed to the nationalistic pride.

The mention of Jehoiachin in v.4 reveals that he was recognized as the legitimate king. Zedekiah had been put on the throne by Nebuchadnezzar. He was not the rightful king in the people's eyes. Zedekiah knew the right buttons to push to get a response from the people.

Class Interaction:

- Turn to Jeremiah 22:26-27. What was Jeremiah's prophecy regarding King Jehoiachin?
- Turn to Jeremiah 25:11. What was Jeremiah's prophecy regarding the length of exile?
- Turn to Jeremiah 27:22. What was Jeremiah's prophecy regarding the people taken in exile?

No doubt Hananiah's message was the most popular. It appealed to their flesh. It made them feel good about themselves and their nation. Jeremiah told them what they needed to hear. Hananiah told them what they wanted to hear. It is interesting that "Hananiah" means "the LORD is gracious." That is what he spoke about. He preached on the love and grace of God but failed to mention that "judgment is without mercy" (James 2:13). Nothing about Hananiah's prophecy was correct.

Hananiah's message is so similar to messages today it is frightening. People would rather hear a lie than the truth. The truth of God's Word hurts. It causes us to be forced to evaluate ourselves in light of the whole counsel of God's Word. Many people prefer to avoid this pain and look where ever they can to find a church or a preacher who will soothe their hurts by lying to them. However, in the end, those who accept the lie as truth come to realize the truth would have been much better. Unfortunately, they make this discovery when it is too late.

Point: God is a god of love and justice.

5-6 It is difficult for me to imagine how I would respond if I had been in Jeremiah's shoes. Many of us would have gotten angry and responded with angry words. I get angry every time I turn the TV on and listen to the hordes of false prophets on TV. Many of these men and women have congregations of thousands. I feel sorry for them. They are deceived. They prefer to hear the good words rather than God's Word. I get angry at these men and I make plenty of remarks to myself and to my wife. I get so irritated that I cannot listen very long. But Jeremiah's response was unlike mine. Jeremiah knew that Hananiah's words were untrue for God had given Jeremiah a clear revelation about the future of Judah. However, Jeremiah's love for his people and the hope that they could be reconciled to God caused him to respond in a most unusual way. He said "Amen! The LORD do so..." Many commentators believe Jeremiah's words were spoken in a sarcastic manner. If this were the case, Jeremiah would have been responding like, "Sure,

whatever you say brother.” This is unlikely because the word “amen” which means “so be it LORD.” It is a spiritual word that communicates agreement with the things of God. Certainly we are not to understand that Jeremiah agreed with Hananiah. No, as we will soon see, Jeremiah did not agree with this false prophet, but Jeremiah would have been very happy if his words would have come true. This reveals much about his character. Jeremiah would have rather been labeled a false prophet than see God’s judgment fall on his brethren. Given the choice between God’s mercy and God’s wrath, Jeremiah would prefer to see God’s mercy upon his people. Shouldn’t we also?

Thus we see that Jeremiah’s first response was one of prayer. He prayed that Hananiah’s words could be right but knew they were not right.

7-9 I cannot think of a better response than Jeremiah’s. He did not immediately respond with words but with prayer. How many times have you been confronted with a lie and responded too quickly with your words? How many of these times did you look back and think, “I could have responded in a better way (attitude) or with a better method (accuracy)”? Jeremiah’s response to the lies of Hananiah were not immediate; he first prayed. What a wonderful lesson for us to learn.

However, Jeremiah could not allow Hananiah’s words to go without correction. Jeremiah’s response is found in vv.7-9.

First, in his response to Hananiah Jeremiah never personally attacked him. There were no character assassinations, name calling, accusations, or arguments. Jeremiah even seemed to acknowledge that Hananiah came from a line of prophets, “The prophets that have been before me and before thee...” Jeremiah responded to the lies but he did not act disrespectful toward him.

Class Interaction:

- Turn to II Timothy 2:24 and read.

Too often we are ready to fight with words rather than fall to our knees and ask God for the words to speak and the heart to speak them with.

Second, Jeremiah points out that if Hananiah’s words were, true then they contradicted the words of the “prophets that have been before me and thee.” Specifically, his words of peace contradicted the words of “pestilence.” His words of victory contradicted the words of defeat.

Class Interaction:

- So what is Jeremiah saying here?

If that which is spoken contradicts God’s Word, then that which is spoken is a lie. This is the first test that Jeremiah gives regarding the words of a prophet. This is the best test for us. How many times have you heard something said that did not seem right to you? Your spirit did not bear witness to what was said or taught. My spirit groans within me every time I channel surf and end up on some religious broadcast. There is some good stuff out there, but it pales in comparison to the lies that are taught.

Point: The only truth that is truth is truth that lines up with God’s truth.

Third, Jeremiah points out a third test in v.9. If the prophet’s words come true, then he is a prophet. If his words do not come true, then he is not a prophet. Deuteronomy 18:22 says, “When a prophet speaketh in the name of the LORD, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the LORD hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him.” This is especially true if a prophet speaks peace. If he predicts war, destruction, and judgment his words are more likely to be true.

Class Interaction:

- Why is this? Why doesn’t a true prophet speak of peace and prosperity?

It reveals a whole lot about man. Man is naturally sinful and rebellious. He often times chooses his way over God's despite clear warnings. God has no recourse but to bring judgment.

The same test can be applied to Jesus Christ. Jesus said, "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth, I came not to send peace but a sword" (Matthew 10:34). But Jesus also promised peace, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you" (John 14:27), and "These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace" (John 16:33).

➤ How can Jesus speak both of war and peace?

Because Jesus was the true and final prophet of God. He made peace between us and God. We were at war because of our sin and rebellion, but in Christ Jesus we can be at peace. His death at Calvary turned God's wrath away from us, "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1).

For homework this week I would like for you to do a little channel surfing on your TV or radio. Only do this if you have the stomach for it and the surety of God's Word in your heart. Listen to what most TV evangelist/preachers are saying. Do you hear more about peace and prosperity than judgment? This is the problem with so called prophets. They soothe the conscience of their listeners with words of comfort and hope but never teach about God's wrath toward sinful man. This is what most people want to hear. Where would you prefer to go to church, Judgment Baptist Church or Prosperity Baptist Church? I am not saying that God's messenger should never preach or teach to bring comfort and peace to our hearts and minds. No, the true prophet speaks the whole counsel of God, that which is liked and disliked.

10-11 In vv.10-11 we see Hananiah's response to Jeremiah's words. If you recall, Jeremiah, at the command of God, had built and placed upon his shoulders a yoke to symbolize the submission of Judah to Babylon. It was a visual message that could not go unnoticed. I am sure he walked through the streets of Jerusalem and when asked, "Why are you wearing that yoke?" his response was, "This yoke represents the submission that you and I must give when God uses Babylon to take us captive for our sinful rebellion." I am sure he got the same response, smart remarks, snickering, and outright verbal abuse, that many of today's believers get when they put signs in their yards, bumper stickers on their cars, and signs in their hands that profess their convictions about God, His Word, and the wickedness of America.

The words between Jeremiah and Hananiah were spoken in public (vv.1, 7), therefore the people saw Jeremiah's visual message about submission. Jeremiah responded to Hananiah's words in calmness and firmness. He did not get bent out of shape and spout off words in an angry tone of voice. Jeremiah did not quarrel with the prophet. However, Hananiah did not treat Jeremiah with the same respect and dignity as he had received from Jeremiah. He also had a visual message. He removed the yoke from Jeremiah's neck and broke it (v.9). If a visual prophecy like the yoke on Jeremiah's neck made a great impression, how would the breaking of it greatly impress the people. When Hananiah removed and broke it he was saying visually (v.10) and verbally, "Even so will I break the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon..."

In the previous verses we saw Jeremiah's response: He prayed and he spoke. Here we see his third response: He walked away, "Jeremiah went his way." Jeremiah did not respond nor did he resist. He just walked away. His lack of response was most likely interpreted by the people as agreement with Hananiah's prophecy. We will see in the verses to come that this was not true. Jeremiah made no reply. Why do we usually reply when attacked? Is it not to protect our reputation? Jeremiah did not respond because his reputation was not on the line. He did not respond because it was obvious that Hananiah was not going to receive his words. Proverbs 26:4 tells us, "Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest thou also be like unto him." I have seen godly men answer fools in their folly, hoping to convince them otherwise, only to end up looking like the fool. Sometimes you just have to walk away. This was one of those times.

"Error is generally insistent and dogmatic- the more so, often, the farther it is removed from the truth." –
H.A. Ironside

Class Interaction:

- So which is it? Do you answer or not?

When you look at Jeremiah's response, he did both. He first prayed (vv.5-6), then he responded (vv.7-10), and he then, when Hananiah did not respond, walked away (vv.10-11).

It takes wisdom and godly counsel to know what to do and when to do it. Proverbs 26:4 must be balanced with Ecclesiastes 3:1-7, "To everything there is a season... a time to keep silent, and a time to speak."

By the way, Jeremiah did not need to give a hasty response. He had two years.

12-14 So what did Jeremiah do next? He went to the LORD and got a fresh word. I can imagine that Jeremiah left a little down and out. He may have been humiliated and broken over the whole incident. He knew what God had told him and he knew that Hananiah's words were not true. He probably knew that everyone who listened and saw the events of that day saw Hananiah as the victor and Jeremiah as the defeated foe. In his time alone with God he may have even went before God in prayer and poor mouthed the whole thing. However, God had a word for him and a word for Hananiah. The judgment of God was final. The wooden yoke may have been broken but it was replaced by something worse, "yokes of iron."

Point: Human efforts, words, or devices do not change the will of God.

15-17 We see that Jeremiah prayed, responded, walked away, prayed again and then went back to give his final word, only this time it was a private word to Hananiah. Jeremiah's word to Hananiah was threefold: 1) You are not a true prophet, "The LORD hast not sent thee." 2) You have deceived the people, "thou makest this people to trust a lie." 3) You have been judged, "I will cast thee off the face of the earth, this year thou shalt die."

Why? "Because thou hast taught rebellion against the LORD."

Hananiah's rebellion was not against Jeremiah. It was against God. Soon everyone would know who the false prophet was because the counsel of God would stand. In fact, Hananiah died in two months. This should have convinced the people that he was a false prophet. Hananiah may have been sincere regarding his prophecy. He may have truly thought that God had given him a word. However, when he was confronted with God's Word, he chose not to repent of his words. To the contrary, he boldly declared otherwise. God call his teaching a lie (v.15) and rebellion (v.16). Hananiah learned that "The LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh His name in vain." We often think that this refers to using the Lord's name in a dishonoring way. But when God's Word is taught inaccurately, it "taketh His name in vain." This is a stern warning to us that teach and preach it that we "rightly divide the word of truth."

God does not usually strike people dead in the manner he did with Hananiah, but there are numerous times in the Old and New Testaments that He did. I suppose that if He did, there would be fewer Hananiahs in our world and churches.

Jeremiah met the test of a genuine prophet of God. He spoke the truth and it came to pass. Let us meet the same challenge.

To God be the Glory!

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