

“How Do You Know the True Prophet?”
(Jeremiah 28:5-9 – Pentecost 6 – July 5, 2026)

Jeremiah 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 stood in the house of the LORD, ⁶and 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. ⁷Nevertheless hear now this word that I speak in your hearing and in the hearing of all the people: ⁸The prophets who have been before me and before you of old prophesied against many countries and great kingdoms – of war and disaster and pestilence. ⁹As 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.”

Dear Redeemed in Jesus Christ:

Just because a preacher proclaims, “Thus says the Lord,” does not mean it is so. Jesus warned that many false prophets would come like wolves in sheep’s clothing, claiming to speak in His name. They may look good on the outside and have a nice sounding message; but by their false teaching they deceive and devour souls, drawing many away from true faith in Christ and His Word. Jesus said we would know them by their fruits (Matthew 7:15-20; 24:11, 24).

“How Do You Know the True Prophet?” 1) Many prophets proclaim: “Thus says the Lord”; but 2) Only true prophets are faithful to God’s Word.

1) Many prophets proclaim: “Thus says the Lord”

“Thus says the Lord.” That was how both Jeremiah and Hananiah began their message to the people. But both could not be right.

God had called Jeremiah as His true prophet. Jeremiah faithfully proclaiming God’s Word, yet his message was not popular. Many people in Judah had turned away from the Lord to serve false gods and live in unrepented sin. So Jeremiah warned that the Lord was bringing severe punishment on them. God was using the King of Babylon as His instrument. Already Nebuchadnezzar had captured Jerusalem and taken kings and citizens captive. He had carried off precious vessels from the temple (2 Chronicles 36). He had installed Zedekiah as a puppet king. Just when things were going from bad to worse, in chapter 27 God sent Jeremiah with a message that sounded unwelcome and foolish to many. Jeremiah was to wear a wooden yoke on his neck and tell Zedekiah, as well as the kings of surrounding nations, to submit to the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar. Any nation that did not serve the king of Babylon God would punish by sword, famine, and pestilence. Jeremiah warned that this Babylonian captivity would last 70 years (Jeremiah 25:11).

But now in chapter 28, another prophet stepped forth. Hananiah had a more palatable message. He stood in the temple before the priests and the people proclaiming: “*Thus says the Lord.*” But his message was quite different. He declared that God had broken the yoke of the king of Babylon; and that within two years, the Lord would bring back the captives and the temple vessels.

Who would you rather listen to? How do you know the true prophet? On both sides, the prophets seem to say with equal authority: “Thus says the Lord.”

On the one hand, Hananiah and the false prophets brought a message of immediate peace and safety. Who wouldn’t want that? Who wants to hear that their sin is so horrible that it deserves the worst punishment? The false prophets were telling the people what they wanted to hear: “You’re fine. God accepts you just as you are. God will deliver you. There is no need to change.” Their message sounded so evangelical – a message of love, peace, and deliverance.

On the other hand, Jeremiah and the true prophets brought a stern message warning of judgment, telling the people their sin was so horrible that they deserved what was coming. “God does not accept you in your hard-hearted, sinful way. You must change. Repent before it is too late! Then in His own good time and way, God will deliver you from this captivity by His grace.”

How do you know the true prophet? The question is important today, because there are many preachers declaring: “Thus says the Lord.” Many preach peace in the name of the Lord – the kind of peace people want to hear. It is nothing more than peace in this world, man-made peace. It has nothing to do with true peace with God for sinners, which comes only through repentance and faith in Christ. It has nothing to do with the peace of sins forgiven by the blood of Christ. Many preach love in the name of the Lord – the kind of love many want to hear. In the name of love, they promote acceptance of lifestyles that God’s Word condemns as sinful. They falsely preach that because God is love, He will accept people of all faiths and would never damn anyone to hell. Many preach deliverance in the name of the Lord – deliverance just as you are, deliverance without repentance, deliverance by your own goodness and merit.

This message appeals to the sinful nature in each of us. Who likes to be told: “You are wrong! You must change!” When we are shown our sin from God’s Word, are we always ready to hear it? Or do we get defensive: “What do you mean I’ve got a bad attitude? What do you mean I’ve been selfish and self-serving? What do you mean I’ve been putting other things before God?” We may rather hear someone who goes easy on sin and says what we want to hear: “It’s not your fault. It’s your circumstances. It’s your nature. It’s how you were raised. You can’t help how you think and act.” We like to think we are fine as we are – maybe

needing a bit of covering over some bad spots in our lives, or a bit of polishing of our personality and practice of manners – but basically fine just as we are.

Rather predictably, Hananiah and the other false prophets had a popular following. They preached what was psychologically reaffirming. They preached what was appealing to the modern mind. Their churches were full. They were treated well. Life was good for a prophet who preached what itching ears wanted to hear (2 Timothy 4:3).

At the same time, Jeremiah and the other true prophets had few listeners in their pews. They were despised as stodgy old Bible-bangers with an irrelevant message. They were mistreated and even killed. Life was hard for a prophet who faithfully preached God's Word to rebellious people.

2) Only true prophets are faithful to God's Word

How do you know the true prophet? In our text, Jeremiah shows that the answer is not in how well a message appeals to people, or how popular a preacher is; rather: "Who is faithful to God's Word?" Who rightly divides the Word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15) – rightly preaching God's Law to convict sinners and bring them to repentance; and rightly preaching God's Gospel to comfort penitent sinners in the forgiveness Christ came to win for them?

Here Jeremiah uses the Word of God to expose and denounce the false prophet. His rebuke of Hananiah begins in an unexpected way: "*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*" (vs. 6). Jeremiah is saying: "Sure, it would be nice to see the exile reversed. Who wouldn't want peace and freedom restored?" Jeremiah is all for God having mercy on His people. But it was not going to happen the way Hananiah predicted.

Jeremiah now reminds Hananiah and the people of the Word the Lord actually had spoken: "*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*" (vs. 8). From the time the Israelites entered the Promised Land, God had warned of curses if they should turn from Him to false gods. As a faithful prophet, Jeremiah proclaimed the unchanging message of God's Law to convict sinners, to show the damning consequence of unrepented sin.

When God by His Law calls sinners to repent, it is to prepare their hearts to receive His true Gospel. Through Jeremiah, God wanted to restore His people with a message of forgiveness and salvation in the coming Christ. In place of many ungodly kings in Judah, God promised a King who would come – a Son of David, "*a Branch of righteousness*" who would reign forever over God's people. Jeremiah proclaimed God's true message of peace, love, and deliverance in the name of that coming Messiah. God declared through Jeremiah: "*In His*

days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell safely; Now this is His name by which He will be called: THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS” (Jeremiah 23:5-6; 33:15-16).

Jeremiah and every faithful preacher of God’s Word join the apostle Paul in saying: “*I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified*” (1 Corinthians 2:2). Christ alone is our righteousness and peace before God. Because God loves sinners and does not want anyone to perish, He sent His Son to redeem us from our captivity to sin. On the cross, Jesus suffered punishment as the one bearing all our sins. He was exiled from the presence of His Father instead of us. He suffered the hellish God-forsakenness of the guilty soul instead of us. Through Christ’s death and resurrection, God forgives us and restores as His people. In Christ, we are at peace with God.

Jeremiah tells Hananiah: “*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*” (vs. 9). The message of Hananiah and the false prophets would not bring true peace. Like wolves in sheep’s clothing, their message was Christless. They left people with false peace in their sin, feeling safe in a path of doom.

But to all who listened to Jeremiah and the true prophets, God would bring true peace and restoration. Through Jeremiah, God declared to His faithful people in chapter 29: “*I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.*” Though He chastened them for a time, He would restore them in the promise of the coming Messiah, with hope and a future. (29:10-11)

“Thus says the Lord,” declares the true prophet. The good thing about hearing faithful preaching of God’s Word is that it always comes true. As we live in repentance, clinging in faith to Christ’s atoning sacrifice for our sins, we have true peace with God. In Christ, who is our Righteousness, we live each day in the favor of God. In Christ, God gives us a future and a hope. One day, He will bring us out of our exile in this world, “*into the glorious freedom of the children of God*” (Romans 8:21). He will bring us home in peace and safety, into His everlasting heavenly Kingdom.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be. Amen.