

JEREMIAH 28

HANANIAH BREAKS THE YOKE

In the last chapter, we found that since Jeremiah could not persuade his countrymen to submit to God's precepts, and thereby to prevent the destruction of their own country by the king of Babylon; he busily endeavored to persuade them to submit to God's Providence by yielding tamely to the king of Babylon, and becoming tributaries to him. And in order to give his audience a visible illustration of the meaning of his words, the prophet was commanded by the Lord to publicly wear a yoke, symbolizing submission to the government of the king of Babylon.

Matters came to a head shortly after King Zedekiah had begun to reign over Judah (597 BC). A man named Hananiah of Gibeon (which was one of the priestly villages) rose up and publicly contradicted Jeremiah when he was speaking in the Temple, in the presence of the priests and all the people. Using the holy name of Jehovah – and thereby assuming the language of a true prophet – Hananiah declared that it had been Divinely revealed to him that Jeconiah and all the captives and all the sacred vessels which Nebuchadnezzar had just recently taken away to Babylon would surely return to Jerusalem, before two years' time was up.

How daring was this assertion! Sadly, false teachers often speak with greater boldness than true ones. Was Hananiah conscious that he was wrong, and did he deliberately preach a lie to his audience? Or was he himself deceived into believing a lie? It is difficult to judge the motives of such a man as Hananiah, but it is beyond a doubt that he was an emissary of Satan. He proclaimed his falsehoods even in the Temple of the Lord, the place where the Divine presence dwelt – thus having the audacity to make his appeal to God Himself!

What did Jeremiah say in response to this? Instantly, he spoke up. In the presence of all the people who stood there in the Temple of the Lord, he cried, "Amen!" – that is, "May the Lord do so!" It was as if he said, "O that it might be as you affirm, Hananiah! O that Jehovah would indeed bring those captives home again! But it shall not be done – no, it *cannot* be done – without canceling the Lord's words that He has uttered through the prophets before me." Jeremiah would have been glad if his own prophecies had proved to be false, even though he would have been disgraced thereby. But he knew that this would not be the case. Referring to former prophets who had predicted evil, he said that if a prophet prophesies peace and it comes to pass, then it shall be known that the Lord has indeed sent him. But Hananiah's words belonged to that category of

Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ Hananiah publicly contradicts the prophet Jeremiah, and breaks the yoke that was upon his neck – verses 1-11
- ❖ The Lord pronounces judgment upon Hananiah for his false teachings, and he dies within two months – verses 12-17

false prophecy which Moses spoke of: “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” (Deut. 18:28). And thus Hananiah had spoken; he had dared to utter what was not true.

To persist in falsehood when it has been exposed reveals a most perverted state of mind. But Hananiah did this, for he was not content with merely speaking his false words. There in the Temple stood the true prophet of the Lord, with his yoke upon his neck – which he carried for the purpose of perpetually reminding his people that they must serve the king of Babylon. The false prophet boldly went up to him, snatched off the yoke (almost certainly employing violence to do so), and broke it into two pieces – declaring it to be a sign that Jehovah would thus break the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar from off the neck of all nations, within the space of two full years.

Without answering Hananiah a word, Jeremiah went home – entrusting to the Lord the vindication of the truth of His own Word. Although it is not expressly said here, Jeremiah surely went to spread this whole matter before the Lord, just like Hezekiah had done (Isa. 37:14). Where else should a poor afflicted soul go, except to the throne of grace? If a servant has been opposed in his message, where else should he relate the reception that he has met with, except to his Master? O what a blessing it is to have the privilege of employing prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, to make our requests known unto God!

Apparently soon afterward, the Lord commanded Jeremiah to “go and tell Hananiah, Thus saith the Lord, Thou hast broken the yokes of wood, but thou shalt make for them yokes of iron.” Often, when people try to get rid of a heavy cross, an even heavier one is laid upon them. Hananiah’s breaking of the yoke of wood was of no avail, for Nebuchadnezzar would indeed put the people under his yoke – and that yoke would prove to be an iron one, which they could not break. So Jeremiah went to visit the false prophet and rebuke him for causing the people to trust a lie. And what was the Lord’s punishment upon this deceiver? He had taught rebellion against the Lord; and therefore, he had forfeited his own life! “This year thou shalt die,” Jeremiah said as he turned away; and within two short months, the false prophet was a corpse. Sadly, though, the people were not moved to listen or obey the Lord when they saw the imposter slain by the mere word of His true prophet.

False teachers still abound today – robbing the Redeemer of His glory and bolstering up sinners in their vain-confidence, instead of preaching the pure Gospel of Jesus Christ. But the Lord will surely manifest the truth of His own cause, and preserve His people from their deceptive delusions!

Lord, we praise You as the God of truth, Whose Word is faithful through all ages, despite the lies of false teachers! Amen.

