

“Credo, Domine; adjuva incredulitatem meam,” Mark 9:24.

“Domine, volumus Jesum videre,” John 12:21.

JEREMIAH 28

⁵Then the prophet Jeremiah replied to the prophet Hananiah in the presence of the priests and all the people who were standing in the house of the LORD. ⁶He said, “Amen! May the LORD do so! May the LORD fulfill the words you have prophesied and bring back the vessels of the LORD’s house, and may he bring back all the exiles from Babylon to this place. ⁷Nevertheless, listen now to what I have to say in your hearing and in the hearing of all the people. ⁸The prophets from ancient times who came before you and me prophesied war, famine, and plague against many countries and great kingdoms. ⁹As for the prophet who prophesies peace, only when the word of that prophet actually happens will that prophet become known as someone whom the Lord has truly sent.”



What do parents tell their children when questioned? When they have to do something, be home at a certain time, when they aren’t able to go out, when they can’t have a snack ten minutes before dinner ... the most popular response to these questions and so many more is, “because I said so!”

In confirmation class, when the student isn’t sure about the answer, what is the most popular answer? The answer is, “because God said so!”

From Jeremiah we learn that it is actually a very correct answer. Let’s see how Jeremiah teaches us to know when God did say something and when He has not.

HOW TO KNOW THE MESSAGE IS FROM GOD

1. The appealing religious message (read v5) We are told when the events of chapter 28 take place. Jeremiah was born ca. 652-647 B.C. He began his prophetic work 627 B.C. under King Josiah, who died in 609 B.C. The kings that followed were not friendly to Jeremiah, but rather opposed him and his message. The religious leaders did, too. Jehoiakim was king of Judah 609-597 or so, when

Nebuchadnezzar deposed him and set up Jehoiachin in his place for three months. Nebuchadnezzar was not going to put up with any foolishness, so he put Jehoiachin's uncle Zedekiah on the throne. We are told at the beginning of chapter 28 that this all happened in the fourth year of Zedekiah's reign, 593 B.C.

We are also told about another prophet in this chapter, Hananiah. He was from Gibeon and he also spoke in the presence of the priests and all the people and the Lord. He was explaining that things would get better soon ... in two years, in fact. We are also told he is a false prophet.

This is the problem for us: two prophets, Jeremiah and Hananiah, but only one true message. Each claim to have message from the Lord Almighty. But how do we know which is the real prophet and which is the false prophet? Of course that's easy for us to answer looking back, but, if we were living through this, how could we tell the difference?

Now, you have to admit: If the brightest and best people had been moved off to Babylon, if your center of worship had been looted, and you were still under the threat of war and destruction, would you want to hear Hananiah's message that things would get better in two years? This was certainly an appealing message. >>> Even Jeremiah wished that Hananiah's message would come true. (⁶*He said, "Amen! May the LORD do so! May the LORD fulfill the words you have prophesied and bring back the vessels of the LORD's house, and may he bring back all the exiles from Babylon to this place.*) But that doesn't make it a message from God. Jeremiah had to deny the appealing message as fake news. (⁷*Nevertheless, listen now to what I have to say in your hearing and in the hearing of all the people.*)

Many religious messages are appealing. Appealing to what? Appealing to our humanity, our emotions, our sinful nature. Looting, rioting, racism, trespassing, and abuse can all be presented in such a way that they take on a certain appeal. But each of them breaks God's law and burdens us with guilt. The fact of punishment for sin is not appealing to people. It is the exact opposite of what we want to hear. It convicts and condemns the greatest figures, the biggest influencers, and the best wordsmiths. That doesn't make it wrong. We know that no matter how unappealing a message is, if God says it, then we have to live with it. No matter how appealing a message might be to our emotions, our human side, our sinful side, even to our intellect ... if it contradicts the Word of God, it's not a message from God.

Jeremiah and Hananiah were saying the exact opposite. One of these guys was a real positive preacher; the other was a real downer. But how could the people tell which one was a message from God?

2. The revealing religious message What if a message has history on its side? Does the weight of history make a prophecy true? Jeremiah said, ⁸*The prophets from ancient times who came before you and me prophesied war, famine, and plague against many countries and great kingdoms.* Yes, Jeremiah was suggesting he had history on his side. Past prophets like Isaiah, Elijah, Samuel, even Moses had prophesied war, disaster, or plague against a host of peoples, from the nearby Philistines to the distant lands of Assyria and Cush. Sadly, Israel and Judah found a place on that unpleasant list of condemned nations in the book of Isaiah. Thus the content of the prophecies had been war, disaster, plague ... unappealing.

But is the weight of history a reliable guide to help us determine if the message is from God? No, surely Hananiah could have pointed out false prophets who proclaimed disaster and faithful prophets who proclaimed good tidings.

Do theatrics make a prophecy come true? From chapter 27, Jeremiah had been prophesying with a wooden yoke or bar over his shoulders, like an ox would wear when pulling a cart. But a prop cannot guarantee the true Word of God.

The only thing that makes a prophecy true is ... whether it comes true. Hananiah the prophet took the wooden yoke off Jeremiah's shoulders and broke it, ruining his object lesson, and saying that in two years, Babylon would be broken. Instead, what actually came true? Babylon came and swept through Jerusalem again and destroyed it utterly within seven years, 586 B.C. The Jewish captives weren't returned from that place until the Edict of Cyrus in 539 B.C. Hananiah's message proved false in just a few years, HOWEVER ... everyone would have known that Hananiah was a false prophet even sooner. Jeremiah had another prophecy. He told Hananiah that because he broke his wooden yoke, the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar has become like iron, and under this iron yoke, within a year Hananiah would die. No more than two months went by before the false prophet died.

All could see for themselves that the words of Jeremiah, not Hananiah, were the words of God.

So ... I guess the bottom line to all this is that if God delivers the Word, that's the way it's going to be, because God said so. Our human side will argue about this because we don't like thinking that God is always right. We don't like to think that we, when we disagree with Him, are always wrong. We don't like it any more than when we parents tell our children, "It's this way because I said so." Why is the bottom line to this because God said so?

That's because the Word of God is truth. Jesus says, "*Sanctify them by the truth; your Word is truth*" (John 17:17). We know from personal experience that the word of man is often lies, and you cannot take man at his word. In contrast to that, "*God is not a man, that he should lie, nor the son of man, that he should repent. Has he said it, and He will not do it? Has He spoken and will not make it good?*" (Num. 23:19)

"Because God said so" is our Lord's answer to the many questions that we may have. He has the benefit of being ultimately benevolent. He always knows what is best. Many times we may look back and say, "I didn't get why you said so, Lord, but now I do." "Because God says so," kind of finalizes things.

But all the questions we may have are not necessarily negative questions. Sometimes we may be looking for comfort and assurance. Does the Lord offer us these things? Yes, because God said so. Are my sins forgiven? Yes, because God said so. Does faith alone save apart from my works? Yes, because God said so. Will I be saved from hell and from the power of the devil? Yes, because God said so. Will I go to heaven to live with Jesus? Yes, because God said so. How can I be sure? Because God said so.

God in His Word has said that Jesus His Son took away the sin of the world. He was the Word made human flesh and bones, putting aside all His divine characteristics. He was born under the Law, He was subject to it, yet kept it perfectly. His perfect life counts as our life before God. All our infractions, all our sins, are counted against Jesus. His death on the cross is the atoning sacrifice that sweeps away all our guilty record. How do we know? Why do we believe it? Simply because God said so.

Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.