

The False Prophet Hañaniah

Jeremiah's Seventh Symbolic Action

28: 1-17

DIG: When does Hañaniah predict that the yoke of Babylon will fall? Do you hear sincerity or sarcasm? Optimism or opportunism? Likewise, what tone in Yirmeyahu's voice do you hear in 28:6? Why is it easier to be a prophet of doom than a prophet of peace (28:7-9)? What does Hañaniah do to illustrate his prophecy? How long had Yirmeyahu been wearing it? Why do you think he leaves rather than arguing his case? What does the new message to Hañaniah mean? How does Jeremiah show he is a true prophet of God?

REFLECT: As with alleged prophets for ancient Isra'el, today's political advisors also give opposing advice, often to protect their vested interests. How do you know whom to believe? What political opinion have you recently changed? Why? Is it often easier to say something positive (as Hañaniah did) rather than the truth (as Jeremiah did)? Are you optimistic or pessimistic about future prospects where you live? What shapes your outlook? What role does your faith play in that?

In the fifth month Ab or August in 593 BC during the eleven-year reign of Zedekiah

The one main point to the seventh symbolic action (what might be called a parable in action) is that Yirmeyahu's prophecy was true. King Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians would indeed conquer Y'udah, Yerushalayim and the Temple.

In the fifth month of that same year, the fourth year, early in the reign of Zedekiah king of Y'udah, the counterfeit prophet Hañaniah (whose name means *YHVH has been gracious*) son of Azzur, who was from Gibeon (one of the priestly cities further north of Anathoth), said to me in the Temple in the presence of the priests and all the people (28:1). The rabbis teach that Hañaniah's false prophecy arose from a groundless deduction. Having heard Yirmeyahu prophesy the downfall of Elam (see Ei - [A Message Concerning Elam](#)), a satellite of Babylon, he wrongly concluded that the prophecy would also apply with even greater force to Babylon. Nothing is known of him beyond what is recorded here. He seems to have been the prophetic model. He used all the right language, including the messenger formula (Thus says ADONAI), and the use of the divine name ADONAI-Tzva'ot, and also performed symbolic acts (28:10).

Hañaniah's False Prophecy: This what Hañaniah wrote in the prophetic perfect referring to the future (1) "I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon. (2) Within **two years** I will bring back (**shuwb**) to this place all the articles of ADONAI's house that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon removed from here and took to Babylon. (3) I will also bring back (**shuwb**) to this place Jehoiachin son of Jehoiakim king of Judah and all the other exiles from Judah who went to Babylon," declares the LORD, "for I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon" (28:2-4). **Blinded by his false pride, Hañaniah was blinded by the real facts.**

Jeremiah's Response: Then the prophet Yirmeyahu replied to the prophet Hañaniah before the priests and all the people who were standing in the Temple. Jeremiah said: Amen! May ADONAI do so! May the LORD fulfill the words you have prophesied by bringing the articles of the Temple and all the exiles back to this place from Babylon. It was as if Jeremiah was saying, "I wish that was so, but don't forget this." However, listen to what I have to say in your hearing and in the hearing of all the people (28:5-7).

Jeremiah appealed to the test of the prophets. Hananiah's words could only be tested through the passage of time. It was though Yirmeyahu anticipated Gamaliel, who counselled: If this plan or this undertaking is of men, it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able to stop them. You will only find yourselves fighting against God (Acts 5:38-39). Jeremiah continued: From early times the prophets who preceded you and me have prophesied war, disaster and plague against many countries and great kingdoms. This was exactly Jeremiah's message. **The only proof of a prophet's truthfulness would be the fulfillment of his words** (Deut 18:14-22). But the prophet who prophesies peace will be recognized as one truly sent by the LORD only if his prediction comes true (28:8-9).

Jeremiah was still wearing his yoke of a crossbar and straps (see Eq - **Judah to Serve Nebuchadnezzar: Jeremiah's Sixth Symbolic Action**). But Hañaniah was convinced that he was right. The false prophet went up to Yirmeyahu, took the yoke off of his neck and broke it. Then he said before all the people, "This is what ADONAI says: In the same way I will break the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon off the neck of all the nations within two years (28:10-11a). At this, the prophet Jeremiah went on his way, probably feeling it would be necessary to let future events justify his prophecy (28:11b). Yirmeyahu didn't need to say anything here, because the next **two years** would prove who was the true prophet and who was the false prophet. But more than that, God had not told Yirmeyahu anything to say, and the prophet never spoke on his own.

ADONAI's Response: Unfortunately, it was far easier to break a symbolic yoke than it was to override YHVH's tough verdict or to break the reality of Babylon's power. Shortly after the false prophet Hañaniah had broken the yoke off the neck of God's messenger, the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah to verify his message. **When Hañaniah broke the wooden yoke, he was only imposing a heavier yoke upon all the people.** Go and tell Hañaniah, "This is what ADONAI-Tzva'ot says: You have broken a wooden yoke, but in its place you will get a yoke of iron. I will put an iron yoke on the necks of all these nations to make them serve Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and they will serve him. I will even give him control over the wild animals" (28:12-14). All this contradicts Hañaniah's phony, self-serving prophecy.

The close of Yirmeyahu's words to Hañaniah involves a play on words. Then Ha'Shem raised the ante and speaking through Jeremiah said to the fake prophet, "Listen, Hañaniah! The LORD did not **send you** to prophesy, yet you have persuaded this nation to trust in lies. Therefore, you are a false prophet. This is what ADONAI says: I am about to **send you** from the face of the earth. This very year you are going to die, because you have preached rebellion against the LORD (28:15-16). And rebellion against ADONAI's anointed is rebellion against ADONAI. The Torah declared: **But a prophet who presumes to speak in My name anything I have not commanded, or a prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, is to be put to death (Deut 18:20, also see 13:15).**

Two months later, in the seventh month of that same year, Tisri, or October (28:1), Hañaniah the counterfeit prophet died (28:17). He who predicted deliverance in **two years**, died in **two months** (Second Kings 1:17, 7:19-20, 8:10-15). There is no record of how he died; remarkably, **God** is not made the subject of his death.

The phenomenon of false prophecy did not come to an end with Hañaniah. **False prophets** plagued later prophets (**Ezekiel 13; Zechariah 13:2-6**). Comparable issues regarding the truth of prophecy were anticipated by **Jesus** and experienced by the messianic community at the festival of Shavu'ot (**Acts 2:1-41**). They included the development of various criteria, especially in view of the confession regarding **Messiah** and matters relating to the end times (**Mt 7:15-16, 24:11 and 24; Mark 13:22; Lk 6:26; Acts 13:6; First Thess 5:3; 1 John 4:1; 2 Peter 2:1; Rev 16:13, 19:20, 20:10**). So it has been in every age since. There have always been those who have claimed to speak a **word from God**, like Harold Camping of Family Radio who predicted the end of the world three times in 1988, 1994 and finally on October 21, 2011! The faithful believers of every age have had to struggle with issues of discernment since **Jeremiah's** confrontation with the false prophet **Hañaniah**.²⁸⁰