Jeremiah 28:5-9 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.”

I don’t think you can understand the point of this text without knowing something about the history of this text and the history of the times that Jeremiah is in. So that’s how we are going to start, with me giving you the background and history of what is going on and then we will look at the main thrust of the message. Our theme will be: **IDENTIFYING PROPHETS.**

Please note that we know exactly when these words and this confrontation took place. We are told it was the fifth month of the fourth year of King Zedekiah of Judah, a puppet king who had been installed by the Babylonians as a part of their rule and shake up of the country. In other words, this confrontation took place in 593 B.C.

You should already be alert to the fact that things weren’t what they were supposed to be just because I told you Zedekiah was a puppet king. Jeremiah has been a prophet since the 13th year of King Josiah, the last godly king of Judah. The reforms and encouragements for faithfulness to God under Josiah were welcomed but as soon as Josiah died, well things fell apart very quickly. In a period of just over 12 years there would be a succession of 4 different kings, all rather ungodly. Please note that in 605 B.C. the Babylonians had already conquered the land of Judah and had already taken away the cream of the crop. You might remember some boys by the name of Daniel, or Shadrack, Meshack and Abednego? They were some of the first to be taken to Babylon to serve the king. So clearly things are not going well for Judah at this point.

What was the problem? Well, you almost have to go back to the reign of Rehoboam, son of Solomon in 913 BC. That was the period when the nation of the Jews split into two nations, Israel to the north and Judah to the south. Most of these problems arose because the people and the nation simply refused to hear and believe in the Lord. God sent prophet after prophet to speak his truth and his words. In 722 B.C. because of persistent disobedience and defiance to God the Northern Kingdom of Israel was conquered and carried away by the Assyrian Empire. Ten Jewish tribes captured and deported. They simply disappeared into the world. God’s judgment on them for their rebellion and rejection of Him!

From that point on you have the Kingdom of Judah continuing on, but unfortunately repeating and regaling in the same types of sins and godlessness of their now, disappeared relatives. God sent his prophets to call them to repent! Depending on how you want to count them, 7 or 8 different men sent to call for repentance and return to the truth and wonder of the Lord God. I think you can pretty well guess that Jeremiah was one of those prophets sent to speak clearly and properly the Word of the Lord.

That’s what lead to the conflict you heard about today. In chapter 27, Jeremiah had given a rousing but difficult message of the Lord. Jeremiah basically told the people that the way it stood, the Babylonians were going to come and carry the people to exile. The good news was that this exile would only last around 70 years and then the nation would be restored to the land. In the meantime, Jeremiah told the people to keep faith in the Lord and to go ahead and serve the Babylonians to the best of their ability. All of this was punishment, discipline for the rejection of the truth and wonder of God.

The biggest problem was that there were 8 prophets of the Lord and thousands of false prophets, claiming to serve the Lord on the scene. In many cases Jeremiah stood alone. Most of the prophets were false, men who served themselves and cared little for the truth and wonder of God. One such man was Hananiah. On the day of our conflict Hananiah had declared before the people and priests, at the Temple of God, that Jeremiah was all wrong. Hananiah, in the name of the Lord, decreed that the power of Babylon would be broken in two years. That the exiles already taken would be returned and that even the Temple vessels and riches of the Lord’s house would be returned. Needless to say, all the other so-called prophets, all the priests, and the vast majority of the people believed Hananiah. His message sounded better. His message felt better. His message was positive and upbeat and fit their desires. Again, his message was wrong.

And here is Jeremiah, right with him in the Temple and Jeremiah is going to speak the truth. Please note that Hananiah’s message had been public and therefore Jeremiah’s rebuke would be public too. That’s what God demands with those who profess to be his servants. You speak public falsehood, you receive public rebuke. Yet, the real sad part of this is that it will be Jeremiah, the true prophet who will suffer for speaking the truth, rather than the false guy suffering.

Did you catch what Jeremiah said? He starts this way, **“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.** I want to tell you I admire Jeremiah’s words. Jeremiah basically admits that what Hananiah declared would be really awesome. So, in earnest, what you find here is that Jeremiah in a way offers a prayer that Hananiah’s words would be true. Jeremiah knows they are not true, but it is clear Jeremiah is willing to admit that this promise seems, feels, looks, and plays out a whole lot better than what he said from the Lord.

But in the end, that won’t matter. It doesn’t matter if you like what is said or not. It doesn’t matter if it seems better, feels better, looks better, and plays out better if it is not what the Lord God has said. Because if it is not what the Lord God has said, then it is false hope, false comfort, false faith and, well, pretty well worthless words. So the measure of something is not how you and I feel or even what we desire they say, the measure of preaching is whether or not it is God’s Word. Because if it isn’t God’s Word then it is just false and wrong!

By the way, did you catch the clever way Jeremiah pointed out the false nature of these words? He said, **“May the Lord fulfill the words you have prophesied…”** He doesn’t say, “May the words the Lord gave you…or May the word of the Lord from your mouth…he says, “May the Lord fulfill the words you have prophesied…” He points out these are Hananiah’s words, false words, misleading words. When measured it is clear they are not God’s Words, because they contradict what God has said, not just from Jeremiah, but from previous prophets. Prophets like Isaiah who a hundred years before any of this took place said the same thing about the exile to come, even naming the King, in an empire that didn’t even exist then.

It is verse 9 that drives the lesson home. Verse 9 says, **“Only when the word of that prophet actually happens will that prophet become known as someone whom the Lord has truly sent.”** How does the message measure against time? I can tell you right now that in two years things are not going to get better. Deportations continued, war continued to ravage the land. And then in 586 the city of Jerusalem is going to fall, the Temple of God and the city leveled by the Babylonians. Hananiah had proven a false prophet. Yet make no mistake, it was the people who believed and followed who would suffer because of the false words and faith this man espoused. God’s Word maintains that a true prophet’s words always come true.

This will help you understand how so many of the books of the Old Testament got in the Old Testament. Truthfully, many of the prophets of God, like Jeremiah, trash God’s people, calling them faithless, godless, or spiritual adulterers. They are in the Bible because it was proven they were the true prophets of God. What they said came true! There is the true measure of a prophet. Is what is said true to God’s Word, true to what God declares?

Now I want you to note another section of Scripture. This is from Deuteronomy 13, the time of Moses. Moses says you and I need to be aware of this. **“If a prophet or interpreter of dreams arises among you, and he predicts a sign or wonder for you, and the sign or wonder that he promised you comes true, and he says, ‘Let’s go after other gods that you do not know, and let’s serve them,’ do not listen to the words of that prophet or that interpreter of dreams, because the Lord your God is testing you to see whether you really love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul.”** In other words, just because some guy gets lucky and makes some sort of prediction that happens it doesn’t mean anything if you are lead away from the Lord. The measure will be what God’s Word says. The measure will be if that prophet sticks to the truth and wonder of God as revealed in God’s Holy Word the Bible.

Another case in point. Jesus himself said in Matthew 7: **“Watch out for false prophets….So then, by their fruit you will recognize them. Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and drive out demons in your name and perform many miracles in your name”’ Then I will tell the plainly, ‘I never knew you. Depart from me, you evildoers.”** (By the way, that text was preached on for Pentecost 2, now might be a good time to go back and review.) In other words, if what is being taught goes contrary to the plain words and truth of God’s Word, you are dealing with a false prophets. Jesus tells us they are not going to heaven and if you follow them, you won’t make it either!

What does all of this tell us? To trust God’s Word. To look for a church and a pastor who is going to lead you in the truth of God’s Word. You don’t have to take words out of context. You don’t have to bend or twist what is clearly said. You stick to God’s Holy Word and in that way you learn the truth and in that way the sureness of your salvation is made clear.

So when you hear a modern preacher declare that such and such is not a sin, absolutely contrary to God’s Word, you know it is false and he is a false teacher.

When you are taught that because of God’s great love, God will never hold you accountable for your sins, know that is a lie. For without Jesus and the repentance that Jesus causes, the mark of faith, we would have a problem, a sin problem. Such a message is false and destructive to your soul.

When it is suggested that Jesus dying on the cross was just a unfortunate accident of political times and difficulties rather than the declared fulfillment of God’s plan for the salvation of souls, you know you are dealing with false teachers. When you are told Jesus did not die to pay for your sins or that Jesus did not actually and physically rise from the dead or that Jesus does not live and rule in heaven for your good, even today, that is a falsehood. When you are lead to believe that God’s Word is not God’s Word or that the Bible contains errors or can be interpreted in so many different ways….that is false, the misleading words of those who will destroy your soul. If you are lead to believe it doesn’t matter what you believe just so you believe something…that is false in every way. I could go on and on. The true prophet of God preaches and teaches only what God has revealed and sealed as true.

Put your faith and confidence in God’s Word, whether the prophecy of Jeremiah or any of the Old Testament books or whether the words of the Apostles’ and Evangelists’ of the New Testament. It is God’s Word. It is trustworthy and true. It is given for your eternal life and salvation because it is the revelation and wonder of God for our lives now and eternally. Identify prophets because they stick to God’s Word!

I pray that in the church there are always faithful prophets like Jeremiah, who sticks to the truth despite the hardships and eventual death it brought him. Prophets who understand the treasure of the Word and the wonder of Jesus that Word brings forth. In that way our salvation is sure and certain because through the Word we are brought to Jesus as our Savior. Amen.