

Making God's People Trust in a Lie...

by Pastor Bill Randles

It is happening all over again. In the church, as in the last days of Judah, immediately preceding the devastation of the Babylonian captivity and the destruction of the temple, Christians are being inoculated to conviction and preparedness by the soothing Words of false prophets like Hananiah.

By prophets, in this paper, I refer to the broad meaning of the term, and not the narrow. Anyone who stands in a pulpit or in the name of God speaks as a messenger of God is a prophet in a sense. Pastors and teachers in the Christian church have a responsibility to speak for God to this dying culture. There is a sense in which all Christians are prophets. After all, Jeremiah, Isaiah, Ezekiel and the other Biblical prophets didn't go about giving 'words' to individuals, and slaying them in the Spirit. Read their messages, they were preachers, who called the people back to the God who had saved them and made covenant with them! In that sense every pastor or teacher in the Christian church should see themselves as an Isaiah or Jeremiah.

"Then said the prophet Jeremiah unto Hananiah, the Prophet, Hear now Hananiah; The Lord hath not sent thee; but thou makest this people to trust in a lie" (Jeremiah 28:15).

Of course it is no wonder that Hananiah was better received. Hananiah's "word" was uplifting, and encouraging. To a people already partially humiliated by a deportation of their own nobility and a stripping of the vessels of their holy temple- Hananiah a priest proclaimed in God's name that *"I have broken the yoke of the King of Babylon. Within two full years will I bring again into this place all of the vessels of the Lord's House"*(Jeremiah 28:2-3). Such confidence!

Part of the problem with Hananiah's message is that there is no consideration of the fact that it was sin and backsliding that caused that humiliation, (which he so boldly prophesied a reversal of). There was no mention of repentance, no vindication of God's charges against the people, no connection between the people's suffering and the wrath of the God of the covenant. He merely prophesied peace and restoration and victory. He preached a God of Love, but love only.

Contrast that encouraging Word with the one given to the *'weeping prophet,'* Jeremiah, that Judah would go into captivity for seventy years (Jeremiah 29:10), and that Nebuchadnezzar, a pagan king was God's servant (Jeremiah 25:9) and adding insult to injury - that the best recourse was to see in the Babylonian invasion and captivity the good hand of God and to humbly submit to it. Does that sound like faith and confidence? Where is the patriotism in that?

Jeremiah too preached a God of Love, but as all true prophets do, he correctly showed forth the Love of God in its true context, which is the Holiness of God. Indeed, God is Love and God is Holy. His love is Holy love. God is Sovereign. There would be a restoration, but on God's terms and by God's own means. The problem Jeremiah's contemporaries had with his preaching was that it wasn't man centered.

Contrast also the differences in the position Jeremiah and Hananiah held in Judean society. Hananiah was a priest, and highly regarded. He had a following. Jeremiah was expelled from the temple - his

preaching was ridiculed, and disregarded, for the most part. His message was of Judgment and coming wrath. It seemed defeatist and unpatriotic, and furthermore, Jeremiah himself seemed emotionally unstable and near having a nervous breakdown (*Jeremiah 9:1-2*)!

The same choices are being presented to God's people today. The Evangelical church can be likened unto Judah in Jeremiah's day. They are the remnant of God's people, the witness to a perishing world, the pillar and ground of the Truth. And for them there are Jeremiah's indeed, calling God's people to true godliness, making them ready for the coming judgments, taking their eyes off of this temporal life and fitting them for eternity. Insisting on adherence to the word of the covenant. Because we live in such a potent, toxic culture, we need strong, God centered preaching.

But for every Jeremiah there are a hundred Hananiah's. They run interference, deflecting conviction, soothing a backslidden people,

"...hearken not unto the words of the prophets unto you; they make you vain; they speak a vision of their own heart, and not out of the mouth of the Lord. They say still unto them that despise me, the Lord hath said, Ye shall have peace; and they say everyone that walketh after the imagination of their own heart, No evil shall come upon you" (Jeremiah 23:16-17).

At a time when people should be taught to fear the Lord, and turn to Him, the effect of false prophets is the opposite!

This issue is of serious consequence. At stake is the readiness of the church for *'perilous times.'* The effect of false prophets in Jeremiah's day was to strengthen the people against repentance, rendering them liable to the judgment of God. As Jeremiah predicted that the people would one day lament - *"the Harvest is past, the summer is ended and we are not saved"* (*Jeremiah 8:20*).

Just what are the lies that God's people are being asked to trust in by the new Hananiah's?

Here are three huge ones:

1) You don't have to take God seriously.

I believe that there are literally many people preaching in pulpits and sitting in Christian pews who *'despise God.'* The new preaching is casual, informal, almost *'anti-reverent,'* as if reverence for God is *'religious,'* stuffy and unspiritual. A *'youth minister'* at a Christian college chapel service I attended, actually prayed in the *'kick butt'* name of Jesus! Such irreverence is seen as being *'non-religious,'* *'relevant'* and is no doubt seen as *'being real.'* God's attributes and perfections are not generally being proclaimed by ministers. As Hosea cried out - *"there is no truth, mercy, no knowledge of God"* (*Hosea 4:1*).

2) The lie of a *'nonjudgmental'* God.

The idea of a God of Holy Wrath, of vindictive judgment, is being denied these days, if not openly, than by non emphasis. Church growth *'experts'* have cautioned against the *'courtroom model'* of

evangelism in favor of a more *'relational'* style. Hell and the lake of fire themselves are being denied in evangelical circles these days as pastors and congregations seek to make unchurched *'seekers'* feel comfortable in their congregations. Real grace, the true Love of God as revealed by the gospel, presupposes wrath and Judgment. It is from *'the wrath of God'* which is being *'revealed from heaven against all unrighteousness and ungodliness of men,'* that we are saved from. Jesus died to answer to the claims of a Righteous and Holy God against us. Wherever this doctrine is de-emphasized, there is a Hananiah at work.

3) The humanistic lie, the denial of sin and fallenness.

This is the Lie that people aren't really so bad. Read Jeremiah sometime and contrast his urgency and grief with his hearers complacency. They didn't really believe that they were in such danger, they *"trusted in a lie," "the Temple of the Lord, The Temple of the Lord!"* they would say - they took refuge in mere clichés. The false prophets bolstered them in this vain confidence.

It seems to be happening again, The false prophets are once again *"making God's people trust in a lie,"* the people are not blameless, for once again as in Jeremiah's day. *"The prophets prophesy falsely, the priests bear rule by their means, and my people love to have it so, but what will you do in the end" (Jeremiah 5:31)?*

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