

Deuteronomy 18:20

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But the prophet, which shall presume to speak a word in my name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or that shall speak in the name of other gods, even that prophet shall die.

Analysis

False prophecy test: 'But the prophet, which shall presume to speak a word in my name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or that shall speak in the name of other gods, even that prophet shall die.' False prophets fall into two categories:

1. presumptuous—claiming divine authority without divine commission ('which I have not commanded')
2. idolatrous—speaking for other gods.

Both merit death. The first is subtle—claiming Yahweh's name but inventing messages. The second is blatant idolatry. Testing involves fulfillment (v.22): genuine prophecy comes to pass; false doesn't. However, chapter 13 shows even fulfilled predictions don't validate false doctrine. Truth requires both accurate prediction AND doctrinal fidelity.

Historical Context

Israel struggled with false prophets throughout history. Jeremiah opposed false prophets promising peace when judgment loomed (Jeremiah 23:16-17; 28). Ezekiel condemned those prophesying from their own minds (Ezekiel 13:2-3). Micaiah spoke truth while 400 false prophets promised victory (1 Kings 22). Jesus warned of false prophets (Matthew 7:15; 24:11). Paul predicted 'grievous wolves' among

elders (Acts 20:29-30). Testing prophecy by fulfillment and doctrine remains essential. Modern charismatic movements face this challenge—discerning genuine prophecy from presumption.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. How do we test modern claims of prophetic words or divine revelation against Scripture?
2. What distinguishes presumptuous prophecy (claiming God said what He didn't) from faithful proclamation?
3. Why is capital punishment prescribed for false prophecy, and what does this teach about spiritual deception's gravity?

Interlinear Text

אֵל	הַנָּבִיא	אֲשֶׁר	יִזְדּוּ	יֵדְבַר	דָּבָר
H389	But the prophet	H834	which shall presume	him to speak	a word
	H5030		H2102	H1696	H1697
בְּשֵׁם	אֵל	אֲשֶׁר	לֹא	צִוִּיתִיו	יֵדְבַר
in my name	H853	H834	H3808	which I have not commanded	him to speak
H8034				H6680	H1696
וְאֲשֶׁר	יֵדְבַר	בְּשֵׁם	אֱלֹהֵי יָם	אֲחֵרֵי יָם	וְיָמָת
H834	him to speak	in my name	gods	of other	shall die
	H1696	H8034	H430	H312	H4191
הַנָּבִיא	הַהוּא:				
But the prophet	H1931				
H5030					

Additional Cross-References

Jeremiah 27:15 (Prophecy): For I have not sent them, saith the LORD, yet they prophesy a lie in my name; that I might drive you out, and that ye might perish, ye, and the prophets that prophesy unto you.

Jeremiah 23:31 (Prophecy): Behold, I am against the prophets, saith the LORD, that use their tongues, and say, He saith.

Zechariah 13:3 (Prophecy): And it shall come to pass, that when any shall yet prophesy, then his father and his mother that begat him shall say unto him, Thou shalt not live; for thou speakest lies in the name of the LORD: and his father and his mother that begat him shall thrust him through when he prophesieth.

Matthew 7:15 (Prophecy): Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.

Ezekiel 13:6 (Word): They have seen vanity and lying divination, saying, The LORD saith: and the LORD hath not sent them: and they have made others to hope that they would confirm the word.

Jeremiah 2:8 (Word): The priests said not, Where is the LORD? and they that handle the law knew me not: the pastors also transgressed against me, and the prophets prophesied by Baal, and walked after things that do not profit.

1 Kings 18:27 (References God): And it came to pass at noon, that Elijah mocked them, and said, Cry aloud: for he is a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked.