

Ezekiel 16:35

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Wherefore, O harlot, hear the word of the LORD:

Analysis

Wherefore, O harlot, hear the word of the LORD: The stark vocative "O harlot" (zonah, זונה) strips away euphemism and forces direct confrontation. God addresses Jerusalem not as "my people" or "chosen nation" but as prostitute—the identity she embraced through idolatry. The command "**hear the word of the LORD**" (שְׁמַע עִם־צְבָר־יְהָה) uses the imperative of shama, meaning not casual listening but obedient attention.

This verse transitions from indictment (vv. 1-34) to announcement of judgment (vv. 35-43). The prophetic formula "word of the LORD" (debar YHWH) indicates authoritative divine speech requiring response. **Hearing God's word always demands decision**—either repentance or hardening. Israel's covenant relationship began with "Hear, O Israel" (Deuteronomy 6:4), but they had become deaf through persistent disobedience.

Jesus frequently used the formula "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear" (Matthew 11:15, 13:9, 13:43), indicating that spiritual hearing requires divine enablement. Natural ears can hear sounds, but only regenerate hearts truly hear God's word. This verse confronts Jerusalem with brutal honesty, removing comfortable religious language and forcing acknowledgment of their actual spiritual condition before announcing consequences.

Historical Context

Prophets regularly used shocking language to penetrate spiritual complacency. Hosea named his daughter Lo-Ruhamah ("no mercy") and son Lo-Ammi ("not my people") to dramatize covenant rupture (Hosea 1:6-9). Jeremiah walked with a yoke to symbolize Babylonian captivity (Jeremiah 27-28). Ezekiel's sign-acts included lying bound for 390 days and eating food cooked over dung (Ezekiel 4).

Calling Jerusalem "harlot" would have shocked the exiles, who still possessed ethnic pride in their Abrahamic descent. They needed this verbal shock treatment because polite religious language had lost its power. Familiarity with prophetic warnings had bred contempt. Only raw, unvarnished confrontation could penetrate their self-deception. The exiles faced a choice: humble themselves under God's accurate diagnosis or harden further in self-justification.

Related Passages

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. What comfortable religious self-perceptions does God's word shatter when you truly 'hear' it?
2. How does honest acknowledgment of your actual spiritual condition (not your ideal self-image) enable genuine repentance?

Interlinear Text

לְכָה	זֹהַ הַ	שָׁמַע	דְּבָר	יְהִיָּה
H3651	Wherefore O harlot	hear	the word	of the LORD

H2181

H8085

H1697

H3068

