

Jeremiah 2:8

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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.

Analysis

God specifies those who failed to seek Him: '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.' Four leadership categories are indicted. First, priests who should have taught the people to seek God instead failed to ask "Where is the LORD?" themselves. Second, "they that handle the law" (tophsei hatorah, תופשי התורה)—those responsible for teaching and interpreting Torah—"knew me not" (lo yeda'uni, לא ידועני), lacking personal relationship with God despite professional religious duties. Third, "pastors" (ro'im, רעים, literally "shepherds")—political and spiritual leaders—"transgressed against me" (pash'u bi, פשעו بي), meaning rebelled or broke covenant. Fourth, prophets "prophesied by Baal" (beniv'u nibe'u, בבעל נבעו, literally "prophesied by Baal")—claiming divine inspiration while actually serving false gods. The phrase "walked after things that do not profit" (acherei lo-yo'ilu halakhu, אחרי לא-יועלו הלכו) describes pursuing worthless idols that cannot save or help. This comprehensive leadership failure—religious, legal, political, and prophetic—explains the nation's corruption. When those responsible for spiritual direction are themselves apostate, the people follow into destruction.

Historical Context

Jeremiah's era witnessed catastrophic leadership failure at every level. Priests like those descended from Eli's house at Anathoth had compromised covenant worship for generations. The high priesthood under Manasseh tolerated and even participated in idolatry in the Jerusalem temple itself (2 Kings 21:4-7). Torah teachers (scribes and Levites) either didn't understand or didn't apply covenant requirements to confront sin and injustice. Political leaders ("pastors"/"shepherds")—including kings like Jehoiakim and princes who influenced policy—pursued alliances with Egypt and Babylon rather than trusting God, oppressed the poor, and tolerated injustice (Jeremiah 22:13-17). False prophets like Hananiah and those mentioned in Jeremiah 23 and 28 promised peace and prosperity while contradicting God's actual word through Jeremiah. Archaeological evidence from this period shows syncretistic practices even among religious officials—inscriptions combining Yahweh worship with Asherah veneration, suggesting religious leadership itself was compromised. Jesus later confronted similar leadership corruption among Pharisees and Sadducees (Matthew 23), and Paul warned that false teachers would arise even within the church (Acts 20:29-30, 2 Timothy 4:3-4).

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How does corruption among spiritual leaders exponentially increase the damage compared to individual sin, and what responsibility do leaders bear?
2. What are signs that religious professionals might be "handling the law" or "prophesying" without actually knowing God personally?

Interlinear Text

וְתִפְשֵׁר	יְמִינֵיכֶן	אָמַרְתָּ	אֵיךְ	לֹא	כְּפָרְתָּ
The priests	H3808	said	H346	not Where is the LORD	and they that handle
	H3548		H559		H8610
בְּתֹרֶבֶת	וְתִרְאֵנָהּ	וְיָדְעֵנָהּ	וְיָרַאֵנָהּ	וְיָדְעֵנָהּ	בְּתֹרֶבֶת
the law	H3808	knew	me not the pastors	also transgressed	H0
H8451	H3045		H7462		H6586
לֹא	וְאֶתְרָאֵנָהּ	בְּבֵבָעַל	נְבָא אֶת	וְנְבָבָא	לֹא
against me and the prophets	prophesied	by Baal	after	H3808	
H5030	H5012	H1168	H310		
וְלֹא	כָּלְכָלָה				
things that do not profit	and walked				
H3276	H1980				

Additional Cross-References

Habakkuk 2:18 (Parallel theme): What profiteth the graven image that the maker thereof hath graven it; the molten image, and a teacher of lies, that the maker of his work trusteth therein, to make dumb idols?

Jeremiah 10:21 (References Lord): For the pastors are become brutish, and have not sought the LORD: therefore they shall not prosper, and all their flocks shall be scattered.

Jeremiah 5:31 (Prophecy): The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so: and what will ye do in the end thereof?

John 16:3 (Parallel theme): And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me.

2 Corinthians 4:2 (Word): But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by

manifestation of the truth commanding ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

Hosea 4:6 (Word): My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children.

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