

Jeremiah 23:13

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And I have seen folly in the prophets of Samaria; they prophesied in Baal, and caused my people Israel to err.

Analysis

I have seen folly in the prophets of Samaria—tiphlah (תִּפְלָה) means unsavoriness, tastelessness, or moral insipidity. God uses deliberately mild language for Samaria's prophets compared to what follows for Jerusalem's. **They prophesied in Baal** (ba-Ba'al, בְּבָאָל)—literally 'by Baal' or 'in the name of Baal,' meaning they claimed divine authority for the Canaanite storm god. **And caused my people Israel to err**—ta'ah (תָּעָה) means to wander, go astray, or be deceived. The prophets didn't merely sin privately but led the entire nation into idolatry.

This verse establishes a comparison: if Samaria's prophets who openly served Baal merited only the label 'folly,' what does Jerusalem deserve? The Northern Kingdom fell to Assyria in 722 BC for precisely this sin—Baal worship promoted by prophets and kings. Jeremiah warns that Judah is following the same path despite having witnessed Samaria's destruction. The comparison implies: 'You saw what happened to the North when prophets led them to Baal—why are you repeating their error?' This rhetorical strategy makes Jerusalem's sin worse than Samaria's because they sinned with full knowledge of the consequences.

Historical Context

Samaria, capital of the Northern Kingdom (Israel), fell to Assyria in 722 BC after decades of Baal worship institutionalized by the Omride dynasty (particularly Ahab and Jezebel, 1 Kings 16-22). Prophets like those of Baal whom Elijah confronted on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18) claimed divine authority while leading Israel into

covenant violation. Their prophecies 'in Baal' meant attributing their messages to the Canaanite deity rather than Yahweh. By Jeremiah's time (627-586 BC), Samaria's prophetic corruption and resulting destruction were historical fact. Josiah had even extended his reforms into the ruined northern territory, destroying high places and executing idolatrous priests (2 Kings 23:15-20). Yet Jerusalem's prophets were repeating Samaria's error—not by openly serving Baal but through syncretism, moral corruption, and false promises of peace.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. How does God's relatively mild description of Samaria's 'folly' function rhetorically to condemn Jerusalem's greater guilt?
2. What does the phrase 'caused my people to err' teach about prophets' accountability for those they mislead?
3. In what ways might religious leaders today cause people to 'err' while claiming divine authority?

Interlinear Text

בְּ בָּלָה	הַנְּבָאָה	וְבָתְבִּיאָה	וְשָׁמַרְתָּ	בְּאֵת	תִּפְלַל הָ	וְנִתְּנָהָה	בְּ הַנְּבָאָה	וְבָתְבִּיאָה	וְשָׁמַרְתָּ	בְּאֵת	תִּפְלַל הָ	וְנִתְּנָהָה
in the prophets	of Samaria	And I have seen	folly		they prophesied		in Baal					
H5030	H8111	H7200	H8604		H5012		H1168					

וְשָׁמַרְתָּ	אַתְּ	וְיִתְּנַעַּם	עַמְּךָ	אַתְּ	וְשָׁבָאֵל:
to err	H853	and caused my people	H5971	H853	Israel

H8582 H3478

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 9:16 (Parallel theme): For the leaders of this people cause them to err; and they that are led of them are destroyed.

Jeremiah 2:8 (Prophecy): 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.

2 Chronicles 33:9 (References Israel): So Manasseh made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to err, and to do worse than the heathen, whom the LORD had destroyed before the children of Israel.

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