

Jeremiah 23:16

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Thus saith the LORD of hosts, Hearken not unto the words of the prophets that prophesy unto you: they make you vain: they speak a vision of their own heart, and not out of the mouth of the LORD.

Analysis

Hearken not unto the words of the prophets that prophesy unto you: they make you vain (מַהֲבָלִים הַפָּה אֶתְכֶם) —the verb (haval) means to make empty, futile, or worthless. False prophets manufacture illusions, **they speak a vision of their own heart, and not out of the mouth of the LORD** (חָזוֹן לִבְבָרָן לֹא מִפִּי יְהָוָה). The contrast is stark: human imagination (lev, 'heart') versus divine revelation (pi YHWH, 'mouth of Yahweh').

This indictment exposes the source of theological error—substituting personal preference for God's Word. The prophets didn't invent new doctrines; they repackaged popular opinion as divine oracle. Paul later warned against those who 'tickle ears' (2 Timothy 4:3). The danger isn't merely falsehood but making people hebel—empty vapor, like the book of Ecclesiastes describes worldly pursuits. False teaching doesn't just mislead; it evacuates meaning from life itself.

Historical Context

Jeremiah prophesied judgment and exile (626-586 BC), while contemporary prophets like Hananiah proclaimed imminent peace and Babylonian defeat (Jeremiah 28). The false prophets spoke what kings and people wanted to hear,

maintaining their positions and popularity. Their optimistic messages contradicted God's true word through Jeremiah, creating competing claims to divine authority.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Study Questions

1. How do you distinguish between messages from 'your own heart' and authentic divine revelation?
2. What modern equivalents exist to prophets who 'make you vain' with comfortable illusions?
3. In what ways might you be seeking teachers who confirm your preferences rather than God's truth?

Interlinear Text

כִּי אָמַר רַבָּה יְהוָה: אֶל צְבָא וְתִשְׁמַע וְלֹא
H3541 Thus saith H3068 of the LORD H6635 of hosts H408 H8085 H5921
H559 H3068 H6635 H408 H8085 H5921

לֹכֶד מִבְּנֹת יְהוָה יְהוָה יְהוָה
not unto the words of the prophets that prophesy H0
H1697 H5030 H5012

לְבָם אֶתְכֶם מִתְבָּלֵל יְהוָה מִתְבָּלֵל יְהוָה
unto you they make you vain H1992 H853 H2377 H3820
H1891

וְלֹא יִדְבֶּר רַבָּה מִפְּנֵי יְהוָה:
they speak H3808 and not out of the mouth of the LORD H3068
H1696 H6310 H3068

Additional Cross-References

Jeremiah 14:14 (Prophecy): Then the LORD said unto me, The prophets prophesy lies in my name: I sent them not, neither have I commanded them, neither spake unto them: they prophesy unto you a false vision and divination, and a thing of nought, and the deceit of their heart.

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.

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

Ezekiel 13:3 (Prophecy): Thus saith the Lord GOD; Woe unto the foolish prophets, that follow their own spirit, and have seen nothing!

1 John 4:1 (Prophecy): Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.

Jeremiah 23:21 (Prophecy): I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran: I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied.

2 Kings 17:15 (References Lord): And they rejected his statutes, and his covenant that he made with their fathers, and his testimonies which he testified against them; and they followed vanity, and became vain, and went after the heathen that were round about them, concerning whom the LORD had charged them, that they should not do like them.

Jeremiah 23:26 (Prophecy): How long shall this be in the heart of the prophets that prophesy lies? yea, they are prophets of the deceit of their own heart;

Micah 2:11 (Prophecy): If a man walking in the spirit and falsehood do lie, saying, I will prophesy unto thee of wine and of strong drink; he shall even be the prophet of this people.

Proverbs 19:27 (Word): Cease, my son, to hear the instruction that causeth to err from the words of knowledge.