

Lamentations 2:14

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Thy prophets have seen vain and foolish things for thee: and they have not discovered thine iniquity, to turn away thy captivity; but have seen for thee false burdens and causes of banishment.

Analysis

This verse exposes false prophecy's devastating role: "Thy prophets have seen vain and foolish things for thee" (neviyaikh chazu-lakh shav vetafel). The word shav (נָפֹץ) means vain, empty, false—the same term used in the Third Commandment against taking God's name in vain (Exodus 20:7). Tafel (טָפֵל) means tasteless, unsalted, foolish. These prophets offered spiritual junk food—pleasing but nutritionally worthless. The specific failure follows: "they have not discovered thine iniquity, to turn away thy captivity" (velo-gillu al-avonek lehashiv shevutech). True prophets expose sin to provoke repentance that averts judgment (2 Samuel 12:1-13, Isaiah 58:1). False prophets covered sin, promising peace when judgment loomed (Jeremiah 6:14, 8:11, 23:16-17). Had they faithfully exposed iniquity, perhaps captivity could have been prevented through genuine repentance. Instead, "they have seen for thee false burdens and causes of banishment" (vayechzu-lakh masot shav umaduchim). The term masa (מָסָה) means burden or oracle—the weighty word of the LORD. But these were shav (false) burdens leading to maduchim (banishment, expulsion). False prophecy doesn't just fail to help; it actively harms by preventing repentance and ensuring the very judgment it denies. This shows why New Testament repeatedly warns about false teachers (Matthew 7:15, 2 Peter 2:1-3, 1 John 4:1).

Historical Context

Jeremiah's ministry (627-586 BC) occurred during a time when false prophets dominated Jerusalem's religious establishment. Hananiah prophesied that Babylon's yoke would be broken within two years and exiles would return (Jeremiah 28:1-4)—the opposite of God's revealed plan. Jeremiah confronted him, and Hananiah died as a sign of divine judgment (Jeremiah 28:15-17). Other false prophets included Ahab, Zedekiah, Shemaiah, and others who prophesied lies "in my name," claiming divine authority they didn't possess (Jeremiah 29:8-9, 21-23). These men told kings what they wanted to hear, promising victory and peace. They attacked faithful prophets like Jeremiah as unpatriotic defeatists (Jeremiah 26:8-11, 37:11-15, 38:4). The tragedy is that people preferred comfortable lies to uncomfortable truth. Jeremiah writes: "the prophets prophesy falsely...and my people love to have it so" (Jeremiah 5:31). When given choice between Jeremiah's call to submit to Babylon and survive, versus false prophets' promise of imminent deliverance, leaders chose the latter—resulting in the very destruction that could have been minimized through surrender. Paul warns of similar dynamics in 2 Timothy 4:3-4: "the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears." The desire for pleasant messages rather than truth remains a constant temptation.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. What characteristics of false prophecy (vain, foolish, failing to expose sin) should we watch for in modern preaching and teaching?
2. How does the statement that false prophets didn't 'discover thine iniquity' show the essential connection between genuine ministry and calling out sin?
3. In what ways might we be tempted to prefer 'vain and foolish' spiritual messages that comfort us rather than challenge us to repentance?

4. How does faithfulness to Scripture protect against false prophecy, and what role does the Holy Spirit play in helping us discern truth from error?

Interlinear Text

נְבִיאֵי יְהוָה	וְאֵי חֲזוּ	לְךָ	שֶׁאֵין	וְתִפֹּל לְ	וְלֹא
Thy prophets	but have seen	H0	for thee false	and foolish things	H3808
H5030	H2372		H7723	H8602	
	גַּל וְ	עַל	עֲוֹנוֹתֶיךָ	לְהִשָּׁב יָב	שְׁבִיתֶיךָ
	for thee and they have not discovered	H5921	thine iniquity	to turn away	thy captivity
	H1540		H5771	H7725	H7622
וְאֵי חֲזוּ	לְךָ	מִשָּׂא וְזֶה	שֶׁאֵין	וּמַדּוּחִים:	
but have seen	H0	burdens	for thee false	and causes of banishment	
H2372		H4864	H7723	H4065	

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 58:1 (Sin): Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins.

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?

Ezekiel 22:28 (Prophecy): And her prophets have daubed them with untempered mortar, seeing vanity, and divining lies unto them, saying, Thus saith the Lord GOD, when the LORD hath not spoken.

Ezekiel 22:25 (Prophecy): There is a conspiracy of her prophets in the midst thereof, like a roaring lion ravening the prey; they have devoured souls; they have taken the treasure and precious things; they have made her many widows in the midst thereof.

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.

