

Zechariah 13:5

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But he shall say, I am no prophet, I am an husbandman; for man taught me to keep cattle from my youth.

Analysis

But he shall say, I am no prophet, I am an husbandman; for man taught me to keep cattle from my youth. Continuing from verse 4, this verse describes the false prophet's desperate denial when exposed. **"I am no prophet"** (lo navi anoki, לא נביא אנכי) is emphatic denial—"I am definitely not a prophet!" The fraudulent teacher, faced with shame and judgment, claims to be merely **"an husbandman"** (ish oved adamah, איש עבד אדמה), literally "a man working the ground," a farmer.

The phrase **"for man taught me to keep cattle from my youth"** (ki adam hiqnani mine'uray, כי אדם הקנני מנערי) invents a cover story—"I've been a farmer since childhood; someone taught me agriculture." The Hebrew verb hiqnani (הקנני) means "acquired me" or "taught me," suggesting apprenticeship or servitude. This false prophet fabricates a mundane occupational history to distance himself from prophetic pretensions. He's claiming: "I never had prophetic calling or training—I'm just a simple farmer."

The irony is profound. Amos, a true prophet, genuinely was a herdsman and farmer whom God called (Amos 7:14-15: "I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet's son; but I was an herdman... And the LORD took me"). False prophets now claim the very occupation that true prophet Amos held, but whereas Amos was called by God despite humble origins, these deceivers deny prophetic calling to escape judgment. Truth inverts deception—those who falsely claimed divine authority now falsely deny it.

Historical Context

This verse envisions eschatological judgment when false prophets will be so thoroughly exposed that denial becomes their only refuge. Throughout biblical history, false prophets boldly proclaimed 'Thus says the LORD' when God had not spoken (Jeremiah 14:14, 23:21, Ezekiel 13:6-7). They sought honor, influence, and material gain through fraudulent claims to divine revelation. But when God's truth is fully revealed, their lies will be indefensible.

The agricultural occupation mentioned here recalls that many true prophets came from humble backgrounds—Amos was a shepherd and fig farmer (Amos 7:14), Elisha was plowing with oxen when called (1 Kings 19:19), David was tending sheep (1 Samuel 16:11). God calls whom He wills, often from obscurity. False prophets who once pretended to divine calling will now pretend to common labor, demonstrating that shame will replace pride when deception is exposed. This awaits ultimate fulfillment when Christ returns and every lie is revealed (1 Corinthians 4:5, 2 Corinthians 5:10). Modern application: those who claim spiritual authority without divine calling will ultimately face exposure and shame.

Related Passages

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. Why is false prophetic ministry particularly serious compared to other sins—what makes claiming to speak for God when He hasn't spoken so condemnable?
2. How does this passage warn against seeking spiritual authority, teaching positions, or ministerial roles without genuine divine calling?
3. What does the false prophet's desperate denial teach about the certainty of truth ultimately prevailing over deception, even if temporarily successful?

Interlinear Text

וְאָמַר ר	ל א	נָבִיא	אֲנִי כִי	אִישׁ	עֶבֶד
But he shall say	H3808	I am no prophet	H595	I am an husbandman	H5647
H559		H5030		H376	
אֲדָמָה	אֲנִי כִי	כִי י	אֲדָם	הִקֵּנִי	מִנְעוּרִי:
H127	H595	H3588	for man	taught me to keep cattle	from my youth
		H120		H7069	H5271

Additional Cross-References

Amos 7:14 (Prophecy): Then answered Amos, and said to Amaziah, I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet's son; but I was an herdman, and a gatherer of sycomore fruit:

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