

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 נביה אָנֹכִ) 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 עָבֵד אַדְמָה), 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 הִקְנַנִּי מִנְעָרָי) invents a cover story—"I've been a farmer since childhood; someone taught me agriculture." The Hebrew verb hiqnani (הִקְנַנִּי) 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

Psalm 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

רַאֲמָם	אִישׁ	לְאַמְתָּה	עָבָד
But he shall say	I am no prophet	I am an husbandman	
H559	H3808 H5030	H595 H376	H5647

אַדְמָה	מִצְעָדָה
אַדְמָה	מִצְעָדָה
H127 H595 H3588	for man taught me to keep cattle from my youth

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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