

Oracles to the False Prophets (23:9-40)

GENERAL HEADING (23:9A)

This functions as a heading to this entire section, which is comprised of a collection of oracles concerning false prophets and prophecy.

THE LAND IS FULL OF ADULTERY (23:9B-12)

The unit opens with a lament from Jeremiah himself, setting the stage for the seriousness of what follows and the devastating consequences (v. 9b). The next section switches to divine speech, where the Lord Himself pronounces judgment on the prophets and priests who, through their false words and immoral lives, have led the whole land into sin (vv. 10-12).

Prophetic Lament (23:9b)

Judgment Oracle to the Prophets and Priests (23:10-12)

Accusation: The Land is Full of Adulterers (vv. 10-11)

Sentence: Disaster and Punishment (v. 12)

JUDGMENT ORACLE AGAINST THE FALSE PROPHETS OF JERUSALEM (23:13-15)

The second unit consists of a single judgment oracle against the false prophets, who not only preach a false message, but engage in a corrupt moral lifestyle. It begins with the Lord reminding them that the prophets of Samaria led the Northern Kingdom of Israel into Baal worship, which brought about their eventual demise. The implication is that the prophets of Jerusalem led Judah toward the same fate.

Accusation

The Prophets of Samaria Led to Its Downfall (v. 13)

The Prophets of Jerusalem Are Leading the People to Sin (v. 14)

Sentence

Message Formula (v. 15a)

Oracle (v. 15bc)

THE FALSE PROPHETS AND THEIR MESSAGE (23:16-22)

This unit is made up of smaller oracles that emphasize the difference between the message of the false prophets and that of the true prophets. It begins with a divine appeal to disregard the false message, which only fills the people with vain hopes and gives them license to commit immorality (vv. 16-17). This is followed by questioning whether these prophets have really stood before the Lord (v. 18); if they had, they would have understood that the Lord's wrath was upon them (vv. 19-20). The closing divine oracle provides proof that they are indeed false prophets: they did not lead the people to repentance (vv. 21-22).

An Appeal to the People to Not Listen to the False Prophets (23:16-17)

Rhetorical Questions: Have the False Prophets Stood in the Lord's Council? (23:18)

The Lord's True Word: His Wrath Has Gone Forth (23:19-20)

Proof the False Prophets Did Not Stand in the Council of the Lord (23:21-22)

THE FALSE PROPHETS' LYING DREAMS (23:23-32)

This unit centers around the theme of the false prophets' dreams, which they use to deceive the people. It opens with a series of three rhetorical questions pointing to the reality that God is near, and therefore sees everything done on the earth (vv. 23-24). This is followed by a complex judgment oracle beginning with the Lord Himself having heard what the false prophets have said regarding their dreams (v. 25) and two more questions centering around the prophets' motivation for what they're doing (v. 26). Similarly, the next oracle begins by contrasting the false prophets' dreams with the true word of the Lord (v. 28), followed by two questions that further draw this contrast (vv. 28-29). The Lord declares that He is against the prophets who do these things (vv. 30-32)

Three Rhetorical Questions: God is Immanent and Sees Everything (23:23-24)

Accusation

God Has Heard the False Prophets (23:25)

Rhetorical Questions Regarding the False Prophets' Motivation (v. 26)

Nature of a True Prophet and True Prophecy (23:28)

Rhetorical Questions Comparing the True and False Prophets' Messages (v. 29)

Sentence: The Lord is Against the False Prophets

The Lord Against the Prophets who Steal Prophecies (23:30)

The Lord Against the Prophets who Make False Declarations (23:31)

The Lord Against the Prophets who Prophecy Lying Dreams (23:32)

THE BURDEN/ORACLE OF THE LORD (23:33-40)

Whereas the previous unit focused on the false prophets' dreams, the focus here is those speaking the "burden of the Lord." The wordplay comes from the Hebrew word *maśśā'*, which can be translated as *burden* or *oracle*. The unit consist of three sections. First, the Lord commands Jeremiah to say that those uttering "the burden of the Lord" will face punishment (vv. 33-34). Next, Jeremiah himself directs the community to inquire, but not utter "the burden of the Lord" (vv. 35-37). Lastly, the Lord Himself addresses the community, pronouncing judgment (in the form of destruction and exile) on those falsely speaking the Lord's oracles (vv. 38-40).

The Lord's Command to Jeremiah on How to Respond... (23:33-34)

...to Those Asking, "What is the Burden of the Lord?" (v. 33)

...to Those Falsely Speaking the Burden of the Lord (v. 34)

Jeremiah's Command to the Community... (23:35-37)

...to Only Ask, "What has the Lord Spoken?" (v. 35)

...to Not Speak, "The Burden of the Lord" (v. 36)

...to Only Ask the Prophet, "What has the Lord Spoken?" (v. 37)

Consequences for Using the Phrase: "The Burden of the Lord" (23:38-40)