

Faith Pulpit

Am I Feeding My People Mouse Poison? Jeremiah 23:15–32

Some mice had been snacking on our chocolates at night, so we set out some mouse treats for them when we took a trip this winter. Know what? Inert ingredients make up 99.995% of the poison.¹

The believer today must realize that false teachers try to feed people with the same type of bait. They add their own poison to God's truth to end up with false teaching.

Jeremiah warned the people of Judah repeatedly about the results of false teaching. He faced the same opposition to the truth that leaders face today. Telling the people that they faced destruction certainly did not make him popular, but it was what the LORD had said.

The Babylonians did not destroy the people of Judah at the moment of Jeremiah's prophecy, but God's judgment did come. Today many people are feeding on false teachings, and they think no harm will ever happen to them. Like mice tricked into eating poison, they eat up the sugar-coated lies of our adversary.

What will happen to those who feed on false teaching? Jeremiah warned of three deadly results.

1. They Will Become Empty (vs. 15–22).

Jeremiah warned the people not to listen to the false prophets because the words they spoke offered nothing but vain hopes.² The people of Judah should have learned from their fathers, who had become empty by following after emptiness (2:5). Now Jeremiah warned the people not to listen to the empty teachings of these false prophets lest, following in their fathers' footsteps, they become just like the message?empty. The message of the false prophets³ came from a vision of their own heart,⁴ but Jeremiah's message came from the mouth of the LORD (vs. 16; see also 1:9).

The real message of the LORD was wrath, not peace, for the ones who walked by the stubbornness of their own hearts. Jeremiah asked if anyone had stood in the counsel⁵ of the LORD before speaking (vs. 18). They had not. In fact, they habitually ran and prophesied without being sent or receiving the LORD's Word (vs. 21).

If my message does not come from the mouth of the LORD, those who hear me will face the danger of becoming filled with false hope. In *Bibliotheca Sacra*, S. Lewis Johnson told the story of an experienced preacher who understood this principle: "On one occasion he had to listen to a brash young preacher, very sure of himself, who displayed little evidence of the life and power of God in his preaching. When the message was over, he went over to the confident youth and said, 'Was you sent, or did you just went?'"⁶ God's Word says it best: "But if they had stood in my counsel, and had caused my people to hear my words, then they should have turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their doings" (vs. 22).

I must make sure that I am teaching the Bible accurately in order to protect my students from believing empty teachings and from becoming empty themselves.

2. They Will Forget the Name of the LORD (vs. 23–27).

The second result of feeding on false teaching is that those who do will forget the name of the LORD. The hearts of the false prophets ran from God, but their intentions could not escape His presence. They said, "I have dreamed, I have dreamed." Their dreams abused a legitimate form of revelation⁷ to prophesy falsehood, through the deception of their own hearts (vs. 26). Verse 27 gives the reason: "Who think to cause my people to forget my name by their dreams which they tell every man to his neighbor."

The prophets used the name LORD along with their dreams, teaching that Judah could continue to walk after other gods without facing destruction. The LORD had said the opposite. Through Jeremiah, He warned the people that they would face judgment because they had forgotten Him and trusted in falsehood (13:25). In his temple address Jeremiah asked, "Will ye steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and burn incense unto Baal, and walk after other gods whom ye know not; And come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, We are delivered to do all these abominations?" (7:9,10). The false prophets must have been teaching that the existence of the temple would prevent God's destruction, and false security resulted. Just as God allowed the destruction of the place of His dwelling presence at Shiloh⁸, He would allow the destruction of the temple (7:12).

God expects people to walk a certain way because of Who He is. The practice of idolatry made the One Who fills the heavens and the earth seem like a powerless god like Baal. Once again they did the same thing that their fathers had done and forgot the LORD. The LORD's character demands special

attention. He is not just another name. He is THE NAME.

When I become accustomed to the name of the LORD, I face the danger of forgetting that He is the personal God Who made me and expects me to walk as His Word declares.

3. They Will Go Astray from the LORD (vs. 28–32).

The third result of feeding on false teaching is a departure from the LORD. God compared His Word to the word of the false prophets because the false word had been mixed with the truth of His Word. He used an agricultural illustration to show that truth and falsehood should be separated as wheat is separated from the chaff (true word : false word :: wheat : chaff). This illustration also shows that the wheat is profitable, but the chaff is useless. The one who has a dream may tell it, but God warns him to keep it separate from His Word. “And he that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully” (vs. 28).

“Is not my word like a fire? saith the LORD; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?” (vs. 29). Two times previously Jeremiah referred to the working of God’s Word as fire (5:14; 20:9), and now he uses the picture of a hammer that shatters a large rock to show the power of His Word. This word for breaketh⁹ occurs rarely in the Bible, and the modern Hebrew word for “bomb” comes from this word. In The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, Charles Feinberg describes its result: “His message does not lull men in their sins; it crushes the heart to bring it to repentance.”¹⁰

The LORD’s Word would have worked to bring His people back (vs. 22), but the false prophets’ word did the opposite. The source of their message caused the problem. It started in their hearts (vs. 18, 26) and also came from theft (vs. 30) and from false dreams (vs. 32). The danger for Judah came when these prophets mixed their teachings with the Word of God. The false prophets did speak of the promises of the LORD’s covenant, but they did not speak of the demands. They rested in the promises that God would always abide with them and that David would always have a descendant upon the throne, but they paid no attention to the curses of the covenant.¹¹ Hananiah prophesied in chapter 28 that the temple vessels and the former king would come back to Jerusalem. Ronald E. Manaham states in the Grace Theological Journal that this prediction may represent the “essence of [Hananiah’s] theology-the temple vessels and the former king.”¹²

Those false teachings led the LORD’s people astray (vs. 32). Isaiah used the same word astray when he said, “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way, and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Isa. 53:6). It makes sense that Jeremiah called the false prophets “shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture” (23:1).

People may end up far away from God if they hear parts of the Word mixed up with other ideas. Therefore I need to teach all of God’s Word in the way that God meant it to be understood, so that my

hearers will hear it correctly.

False teachings abound today as they did in the time of Jeremiah, and many of these teachings started with intentions to lead others astray. Some falsehood, however, has probably resulted from the teacher's lack of training or diligence to teach the Word faithfully.

FBTS purposes to train leaders to become better Bible expositors. People are believing lies today, and they need equipped leaders to rescue them from falsehood. Paul encouraged Timothy to continue in what he had learned in the Scriptures because all Scripture is profitable (II Tim. 3:16). The false teachers did not profit people at all, as verse 32 of Jeremiah 25 declares: "I sent them not, nor commanded them; therefore, they shall not profit this people at all, saith the LORD."

The instructions on our box of mouse poison say that the mice might not die right away from the poison. It could take five days to kill them, because the poison is hidden in food disguised to make it appealing to the mice. Those who believe lies that are mixed with the truth face the same danger. They get used to the taste, and they keep going back for more and more.

All believers, but especially teachers, must compare everything we hear today with the truth of God's Word. I must do a better job of standing in the counsel of the LORD, remembering the name of the LORD, and relying on the power of His Word to profit those who hear me.

Works Cited

1. The brand of mouse poison used was d-CON Mouse-Prufe II.
2. The Hebrew Bible does not use the verb *haba l* "act emptily, become vain" often in the Qal (Jer. 2:5; 2 Kings 17:15; Psa. 62:11; Job 27:12). It occurs only in Jer. 23:16 in the Hiphil stem. The noun form of this verb, *hebel*, means "vapour, breath, vanity." See Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 210, 211.
3. "Pseudoprophets" in the Greek Translation of the Hebrew Scriptures. See Manahan, Ronald E. "A Theology of Pseudoprophets: A Study of Jeremiah." *Grace Theological Journal*, vol. 1, #1, Spring 1980, 78, 97.
4. Hebrew *lebab*, "inner man, mind, will, heart." Brown, Driver, and Briggs, 528. See Jer. 17:9, where Jeremiah had already stated that the heart was deceitful and sick.
5. Hebrew *sod*. Brown, Driver, and Briggs, 691.
6. Johnson, S. Lewis, "The Jesus That Paul Preached" *Bibliotheca Sacra*. vol. 128, #510, April 1971, 124.
7. cf. Gen. 37, 41; Dan. 2.
8. cf. 1 Sam. 4:1–11.
9. Hebrew *y'potsets*.
10. Feinberg, Charles, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 6., ed. by Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 524, 525.
11. See Deut. 28:15–68 for an example of curses that would result from disobedience.
12. Manahan, Ronald E., 96.

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