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From Divine Revelation to Human Invention: Jeremiah 23:26-32 and the Challenge of False Prophecy in the Contemporary Christ Apostolic Church

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Abstract

Prophecy holds a significant place in biblical religion and in contemporary Pentecostal and African Christian spirituality. The prophetic ministry becomes problematic when human imagination, personal interest, fabricated dreams, borrowed religious formulae or presumptuous speech are dressed up as divine revelation. Jeremiah 23:26-32 confronts exactly this distortion. It condemns prophets who speak from their own hearts, relay deceptive dreams, steal divine words and presumptuously claim divine authority, and it climaxes in the verdict that such prophecy does not benefit God's people. This study employed historical-grammatical and contextual approaches to examine the passage, with particular attention to the Hebrew concepts לֵב (heart), תַּרְמִית (deceit), חֲלוֹם (dream), דָּבָר (word/message), גָּנַב (steal), לָשׁוֹן (tongue), פַּחֲזוּת (recklessness) and יָעַל (profit/benefit). The paper argued that Jeremiah's critique reaches beyond prophecy as such to the corruption of prophetic authority, source, communication and ethical responsibility. Findings showed the implications for prophetic practice in the Christ Apostolic Church (CAC), especially in biblical formation, spiritual discernment, prophetic accountability, resistance to commercialisation, and the protection of congregational welfare. Paper concluded that the Prophetic renewal calls for a recovery of divine revelation, biblical fidelity, ethical integrity, and the genuine spiritual and communal benefit of God's people.

Keywords: False Prophecy, Prophetic Ethics, Divine Revelation, Christ Apostolic Church, Prophetic Integrity

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1. Introduction

Prophecy occupied a central place in the religious life of ancient Israel and also remains prominent in various contemporary Christian communities, especially within African Pentecostal and indigenous Christian traditions. Biblical theology understands the prophet as a messenger who carries a divine word to a particular community at a particular historical moment. That definition binds prophetic ministry to revelation, authority, truthfulness, responsibility and communal welfare. When this bond is intact, prophecy can challenge injustice, call people to repentance, announce divine judgement, offer hope and steer the community towards covenantal faithfulness. While corrupted, prophetic speech becomes a vehicle for deception, manipulation, personal ambition and religious exploitation.

In the book that bears his name, Jeremiah offers one of the most sustained biblical critiques of false prophecy. His conflict with other prophets went far deeper than a disagreement about future events; it concerned the source of revelation, the legitimacy of prophetic authority, the content of the message, and the consequences of prophetic speech. His rivals claimed to speak in the name of Yahweh. Their messages repeatedly contradicted the divine word announced through Jeremiah. The underlying problem was epistemological and theological: how can anyone identify a divine message from the one originated from the prophet?

Jeremiah 23:26-32 sits at the heart of this controversy, and it names several marks of deceptive prophecy. Some prophets speak from their own לֵב (heart). Others relay חֲלוֹמוֹת (dreams) that lead the people to forget Yahweh's name. Some גָּנַב (steal) divine words from one another. Others wield their לָשׁוֹן (tongue) presumptuously, announcing, "Thus says the Lord." Their reckless speech, in the end, does God's people no good at all. False prophecy, on this account, is a failure of revelation and a failure of ethics.

The issue has contemporary relevance in that prophetic ministry continues to shape Christian communities in Nigeria, including the Christ Apostolic Church (CAC), where prayer, prophecy, visions, dreams, divine guidance and spiritual discernment have long been central to religious practice. Prophecy itself raises no difficulty. The theological challenge begins when personal opinions, predictions, dreams, financial interests, borrowed revelations or unverifiable claims are passed off as direct divine speech. Studies of contemporary Nigerian religion have documented concern over the proliferation of prophetic claims, commercialisation, manipulation and the misuse of prophetic authority (Adabembe, 2025; Awojobi, 2018). This study rereads Jeremiah 23:26-32 as a theological and ethical framework for prophetic integrity. The text is far from a simple rejection of prophecy, and the study examines the criteria Jeremiah uses to separate authentic divine communication from human invention. The Hebrew expressions receive close attention throughout, since the language itself reveals how Jeremiah understood false prophecy.

The central argument traces a coherent progression; false prophecy begins in the human לֵב (heart). It expresses itself through תַּרְמִית (deceit), leans on חֲלוֹם (dream) as an illegitimate source of authority, appropriates דָּבָר (word/message) through גָּנַב (stealing), uses the לָשׁוֹן (tongue) to claim divine authority, proceeds with פַּחֲזוּת (recklessness), and finally fails to יָעַל (profit/benefit) God's people. This movement offers a framework for evaluating contemporary prophetic ministry that keeps the biblical concept of prophecy fully intact.

2. Methodology

The study employed a historical-grammatical and contextual exegetical method. The historical-grammatical approach examines Jeremiah 23:26-32 within its literary, historical, linguistic and theological settings, giving particular attention to Hebrew vocabulary, grammatical constructions, semantic relationships and the rhetorical development of the text. The contextual approach then reads the passage

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within the larger prophetic controversy of Jeremiah 23:9-40. The pericope is interpreted in relation to Jeremiah's wider denunciation of prophets who claim divine authority without divine commission. A theological-ethical application to contemporary prophetic practice in the CAC completes the method as it makes no assumption that contemporary Christian prophets occupy the same institutional role as ancient Israelite prophets. It identifies transferable principles concerning revelation, truthfulness, accountability, discernment and communal welfare.

3. Literature Review and Research Gap

Prophetic Authority in Jeremiah

Scholarship on Israelite prophecy has repeatedly shown that a prophet's authority is inseparable from the question of divine commission. Historical studies locate Israelite prophets within a wider ancient Near Eastern world in which rulers and communities sought divine guidance through specialists who interpreted signs, dreams and messages (Lindblom, 1973; Nissinen, 2003). Israel's prophetic traditions went further. They developed distinctive theological criteria for weighing such claims, including fidelity to Yahweh, covenantal accountability, and the consequences of a message for the community. Form is insufficient. Confidence is insufficient too. Neither can define prophecy on its own.

Studies of Jeremiah stress the clash between the prophet and those who claim to speak for Yahweh and announce messages that contradict his proclamation. Carroll (1986), McKane (1986), Thompson (1980) and Allen (2008) come at the book from different critical angles. They underlines the literary and theological weight of prophetic conflict. Jeremiah 23:9-40 does more than set competing predictions side by side. It exposes a crisis of authority in which religious speech can hide the divine word from view. The real question concerns warrant: whose message is authorised, and what kind of communal life does it sustain? Predictive accuracy is only a small part of that question.

Dreams, Discernment, and Prophetic Ethics

Dreams play a significant role in Jeremiah 23:25-32. The ancient world often regarded them as channels of divine communication, and a dream's presence alone could never establish the legitimacy of a prophetic claim. The text sets a dream against Yahweh's word as the contrast leaves room for genuine dreams. Jeremiah's objection targets the presentation of a humanly generated or deceptive dream as an authoritative message from God. Tarrer (2013) traces the interpretation of true and false prophecy across a long history of reading and reception. Umeanolue's (2020) study of the conflict in Jeremiah 27-28 shows that prophetic disputes remain significant for biblical interpretation. These studies support a contextual reading, that recongnises the historical specificity of Jeremiah's conflict and the broader theological questions it raises. Ethical interpretations of prophecy turn attention to the effects of religious speech. Brueggemann (2001) links prophetic imagination to the power of prophetic discourse to unsettle established social and political arrangements. Wessels (2011) focuses majorly on the failure of deceptive prophecy to benefit the people. The two emphases complementary: Prophetic speech may confront a community, and confrontation is a different thing from manipulation; an uncomfortable message can be entirely true. Jeremiah never demands that prophecy reassure its audience. His demand is sharper. No prophet may claim divine authority for a message that is deceptive, unauthorised, or destructive of covenantal faithfulness.

Prophecy in Nigerian and Christ Apostolic Church Contexts

Study of Nigerian Christianity situates prophetic ministry within a religious environment where dreams, prayer, healing, spiritual direction and claims of divine guidance may be at the centre of worship and pastoral care. Awojobi (2018) posits that prophets as consultants in ancient Israelite and Nigerian socio-cultural contexts and offers a useful comparison that keeps the two contexts distinct. Abioje (2011)

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raises concerns about the commercialisation of religion through the mass media. Adabembe (2025) examines the proliferation of prophecy and claims of fake prophets in Southwestern Nigeria. These sources suggest that prophetic authority is exposed to financial incentive, media performance, and the public appetite for certainty. Commercial or manipulative practice in some contexts cannot justify a sweeping judgement on Nigerian churches or their prophetic traditions.

Historical accounts of the CAC, including Alokan (1991, 2010) and Adewunmi (2014), illuminate the church's emphasis on prayer, holiness, healing and spiritual gifts. The present study offers no empirical survey of CAC congregations. It makes no claim that every practice discussed in wider Nigerian religious discourse appears uniformly within the denomination. Christ Apostolic Church serves as the contemporary ecclesial setting through which the ethical implications of Jeremiah 23:26-32 are considered. The distinction matters methodologically. Exegesis can supply a framework for discernment; claims about how often particular abuses occur, or where, require fieldwork and evidence from specific congregations.

Research Gap and Contribution

The literature offers rich resources for understanding Israelite prophecy, Jeremiah's conflict with rival prophets, and contemporary concern about prophetic authority. These discussions are seldom joined through a sustained, word-sensitive reading of Jeremiah 23:26-32 that moves from the Hebrew vocabulary of the passage to a practical ethical framework for a specific Nigerian church. This paper fills that gap as it follows the pericope from the inner source of speech, through deception and the misuse of dreams, to the appropriation of divine words, presumptuous claims, recklessness, and the failure to benefit the community. Its contribution is interpretive and constructive. It offers criteria to inform biblical teaching, pastoral supervision and congregational discernment in the CAC, and it acknowledges the limits of carrying an ancient Israelite text straight into a contemporary Christian institution.

4. Prophecy and False Prophecy in Jeremiah

Prophecy as Divine Communication

Biblical prophecy is fundamentally bound to divine communication. The prophet is far more than a religious specialist dispensing spiritual opinion; the vocation involves receiving and relaying a message understood to come from God. That is why prophetic speech carries such heavy theological responsibility. Jeremiah's prophetic theology presses hard on the line between divine message and human invention, and the line becomes sharpest in chapter 23, where Yahweh condemns prophets who speak words He never commanded. Confidence proves nothing. Origin is the whole issue. The prophetic office cannot be separated from responsibility for truthful communication.

Jeremiah 23:9-40 and Failed Religious Leadership

Jeremiah 23:9-40 mounts an extended critique of prophetic corruption. The prophets have failed because their religious authority has come loose from covenantal faithfulness and ethical responsibility. Jeremiah's concern extends well past inaccurate prediction to the wider damage done when God's people are misled. The critique peaks in verses 26-32. The prophets claim revelation and deliver messages produced by their own inner world. They lean on dreams, borrow words from one another, and use religious formulae to manufacture an appearance of divine authority. Wessels (2011) observes that Jeremiah 23:25-32 targets prophets whose messages do not truly originate with Yahweh, and whose prophecy therefore fails to benefit the community. Accuracy is one question. Purpose and effect are the larger ones.

5. Historical and Literary Context of Jeremiah 23:26-32

Jeremiah 23:26-32 belongs to a larger unit of Jeremiah 23:9-40, in which the prophet denounces religious

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leaders whose conduct and messages undermine the covenant community. The text attacks prophetic and priestly corruption, condemns messages that promise peace where judgement is due, and warns against claiming divine authority without divine commission. Verses 26-32 focus on the source and manner of prophetic speech. The prophets speak from their own hearts, use dreams to mislead, blur their own words with Yahweh's word, steal messages from one another, and speak presumptuously in Yahweh's name. The closing declarartion that they do not benefit the people, gives every preceding accusation its communal and ethical force.

The pericope cannot be shrunk into a general rule that a prophecy is false whenever it unsettles a hearer or defies expectation. Jeremiah's message was often unwelcome. Its authority rests on the book's presentation of his commission and on the theological conflict that drives the narrative. The text condemns one specific abuse: speakers who borrow the language of revelation to lend human invention the authority of Yahweh. Jeremiah is contesting rival claims in a crisis of public trust, and a neutral handbook for assessing every religious experience was never his aim. Responsible contemporary application must respect that historical particularity even as it draws out transferable ethical principles.

The repeated divine formula "I am against the prophets" (vv. 30-32) shows that more than a slip of wording is at stake. Appropriated words, self-authorising speech and deceptive dreams each become grounds for divine opposition. The rhetorical sequence moves from the hidden source of a message to its public performance and on to its consequences. Jeremiah thus evaluates prophetic integrity at several linked levels: intention, source, content, communication and outcome. This order blocks any simplistic test based only on whether a prediction later comes true. The prophet's claim and conduct face moral and theological scrutiny in their own right.

6. Exegetical Analysis of Jeremiah 23:26-32

לֵב (Heart): The Source of Prophetic Invention

Jeremiah 23:26 asks, עַד־מָתַי הֲיֵשׁ בְּלֵב הַנִּבְּאִים נִבְּאֵי הַשֶּׁקֶר וּנְבִיאֵי תַּרְמִת לִבָּם׃ (How long will this be in the heart of the prophets, the prophets of deceit, who are prophets of the deceit of their own heart?) The Hebrew term לֵב (heart) is key to Jeremiah's diagnosis. In biblical Hebrew anthropology, לֵב (heart) reaches well beyond emotion. It can denote the whole inner person: thought, intention, understanding, reasoning, desire and will. When Jeremiah locates false prophecy in the לֵב (heart) of the prophets, he names the internal human source from which their deceptive messages flow. These prophets have done worse than misread a genuine revelation. Jeremiah portrays them as generating or sustaining a message from within themselves. The term thus sets divine revelation, the ground of faithful prophetic communication, over against human invention, the ground of deceptive prophetic communication.

Inner life becomes false revelation. The prophet's own thoughts supply a message that is then presented as divine. The implications for contemporary ministry are serious. A prophetic utterance can sound spiritually impressive and still spring from human reasoning, expectation, desire, fear or ambition. Jeremiah's use of לֵב (heart) pushes attention beneath the outward form of prophecy, down to its actual source.

תַּרְמִית (Deceit): More Than Mere Error

Jeremiah calls these men prophets of תַּרְמִית (deceit/deception). The term signals deceitfulness, which is far stronger than getting a prediction wrong. A faulty prediction may stem from misunderstanding, limited knowledge or mistaken interpretation. Jeremiah's language targets deceptive representation. The prophets present something as divine revelation that has no claim to that status. Ethics cannot be avoided here. False prophecy distorts religious authority itself, for the prophet effectively says "God says" when God has said nothing. This explains the gravity of false prophecy in the book of Jeremiah. The audience receives bad

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information, and worse follows. People are urged to submit to a message under God's authority when that authority has been falsely claimed.

חֲלוֹם (Dream): Dreams and the Problem of Authentication

Jeremiah 23:27 introduces the language of dreams. The prophets try to use חֲלוֹם (dream) as a vehicle of revelation: "Who think to make my people forget my name by their dreams that they tell one another..."

Jeremiah stops short of condemning every dream as false. His target is the use of dreams as an unauthorised basis for prophetic authority. That distinction matters for contemporary Christian theology. Dreams and visions appear throughout biblical narrative. A dream's existence never guarantees its divine origin. Discernment is the issue. Every dream must be weighed against God's revealed word, theological truth, moral responsibility, and its consequences for the community. Jeremiah's critique dismantles the assumption that every extraordinary spiritual experience carries divine authority.

In Jeremiah 23:27, the prophets use their dreams to make the people forget Yahweh's name. Their experiences work against covenantal faithfulness. The test, then, concerns consistency with God's revealed purposes. Supernatural appearance settles nothing.

דָּבָר (Word/Message): God's Word as the Standard

Jeremiah 23:28 draws a fundamental line:

"The prophet who has a dream, let him tell the dream; but the one who has my word, let him speak my word faithfully."

The Hebrew noun דָּבָר (word/message) stands at the centre of the passage. It can mean a spoken word, a statement, a matter, an event or a message. It denotes the prophetic message that originates with Yahweh. Jeremiah leaves dreams a possible place in religious experience. What he establishes is a clear distinction between a person's dream and God's דָּבָר (word/message). A prophet who has a dream should name it honestly as a dream. A prophet who holds God's דָּבָר (word/message) must deliver it faithfully. The phrase that follows, דְּבָרִי אֱמֶת (my word faithfully/truthfully), introduces אֱמֶת (truth/faithfulness/reliability). Faithful transmission is the point. Authentic prophecy demands that what the prophet says correspond to what God has said. No prophet may bend the message for popularity, money, political influence or personal recognition.

תֶּבֶן (Straw) and בַּר (Grain/Wheat): Substance and Emptiness

Jeremiah continues, מַה־לַּתֶּבֶן אֶת־הַבָּר נְאֻם־יְהוָה׃ (What has straw in common with grain?)

The Hebrew noun תֶּבֶן (straw) is set against בַּר (grain/wheat). The metaphor separates the empty from the substantial. Its force comes from the field. Straw and grain grow together in the same harvest, and only one of them feeds anybody. Jeremiah borrows this agricultural image to separate authentic divine revelation from hollow religious speech. Not every message phrased in prophetic language carries equal spiritual substance. Outward form may resemble prophecy and still lack divine authority. For contemporary ministry, the image calls for discernment between speech that merely impresses and revelation that genuinely builds up.

אֵשׁ (Fire) and פַּטִּישׁ (Hammer): The Power of God's Word

Jeremiah 23:29 asks, הֲלוֹא כֹה דְבָרִי כָּאֵשׁ נְאֻם־יְהוָה וּכְפַטִּישׁ יְפֹצֵץ סָלַע׃ (Is not my word like fire, declares Yahweh, and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?)

The Hebrew noun אֵשׁ (fire) pictures God's word as powerful, penetrating and transforming. Fire illuminates. It purifies, consumes and exposes. The prophetic word therefore works on its hearers far

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beyond entertainment or prediction.

The second image is פַּטִּישׁ (hammer). Hammer meets rock. The picture conveys force and the power to break through. God's word confronts resistance and brings transformation, which places it far above mere information. Both metaphors sharpen Jeremiah's contrast between genuine revelation and empty prophecy. Authentic divine speech carries theological and ethical weight. The prophet's task follows from this. Spectacular predictions that entertain an audience fall short of the calling. The prophet must deliver a word capable of confronting sin, correcting error, strengthening faith and directing the community towards obedience.

גָּנַב (Steal): Stealing God's Words

Jeremiah 23:30 declares, לָכֵן הִנְנִי עַל־הַנְּבִאִים נְאֻם־יְהוָה מְגַנְּבֵי דְבָרַי אִישׁ מֵאֵת רֵעֵהוּ: (Therefore, behold, I am against the prophets, declares Yahweh, who steal my words, each one from his neighbour). The Hebrew verb גָּנַב (steal) carries particular weight. The form מְגַנְּבֵי (those who steal) casts the prophets as appropriators of words. Jeremiah here names another form of corruption: prophetic borrowing. The false prophets lift words from others and present them as if they had received them from Yahweh directly. Responsible engagement with other people's ideas is perfectly legitimate, and prophets may know earlier prophetic traditions and faithfully pass on established revelation. The offence occurs when someone else's message is appropriated and falsely presented as fresh divine revelation. Religious language is easily borrowed from sermons, social media, other ministers, testimonies, books or popular prophetic declarations. Once borrowed speech is presented as revelation received directly from God, it falls under the concern Jeremiah names with גָּנַב (steal).

לָשׁוֹן (Tongue): Manufacturing Prophetic Authority

Jeremiah 23:31 adds another dimension, הִנְנִי עַל־הַנְּבִיאִם נְאֻם־יְהוָה הַלֹּקְחִים לְשׁוֹנָם וַיִּנְאֲמוּ נְאֻם: (Behold, I am against the prophets, declares Yahweh, who use their tongues and declare, "He says").

The Hebrew noun לָשׁוֹן (tongue) refers literally to the tongue and can also stand for speech or verbal expression. Here the tongue becomes a tool for manufacturing prophetic authority. The phrase "He says" creates the impression of direct divine commissioning. Jeremiah has already shown that these prophets hold no message from God. The danger lies in false attribution. A prophet can turn private opinion into an apparently authoritative divine declaration simply by attaching God's name to it. Statements such as "God told me," "The Lord revealed to me" or "Thus says the Lord" claim theological authority. Nobody should use them casually, and nobody should use them to manipulate.

פַּחֲזוּת (Recklessness/Lightness): The Ethics of Prophetic Speech

Verse 32 introduces the term פַּחֲזוּת (recklessness/lightness/rashness): הִנְנִי עַל־נִבְּאֵי חַלְמוֹת שֶׁקֶר נְאֻם־יְהוָה וַיְסַפְּרוּם וַיַּתְעוּ אֶת־עַמִּי בְּשִׁקְרֵיהֶם וּבְפַחֲזוּתָם (Behold, I am against those who prophesy lying dreams, declares Yahweh, and who tell them and lead my people astray by their lies and their recklessness...)

The term describes careless, reckless or presumptuous behaviour. Prophetic speech involves moral responsibility along with intellectual accuracy. A prophet who speaks recklessly about someone's marriage, death, finances, health, career, ministry or future can do serious harm. Jeremiah's vocabulary marks irresponsible prophetic speech as an ethical failure. Restraint is required. The ability to speak must come with the discipline to stay silent when the source of a message is uncertain.

יָעַל (Profit/Benefit): The Test of Communal Welfare

The passage closes with one of its weightiest expressions, וְאָנֹכִי לֹא־שְׁלַחְתִּים וְלֹא צִוִּיתִים וְהוֹעֵיל לֹא־יוֹעִילוּ לָעָם־הַזֶּה נְאֻם־יְהוָה: (Yet I did not send them or command them, and they do not benefit this people at all, declares

Yahweh). The Hebrew verb יָעַל (profit/benefit/be useful) appears in the Hiphil to express the idea of benefiting or producing advantage. The emphatic construction וְהוֹעֵיל לֹא־יוֹעִילוּ (they do not benefit at all) lends the conclusion considerable force. The criterion is striking. False prophecy fails God's people. Prophetic ministry has an unavoidable communal dimension. Emotional response cannot authenticate genuine prophecy, and neither can a large following or the drama of a prediction. Genuine prophecy must serve the real good of God's people. Wessels (2011) identifies this failure to benefit the community as a central feature of Jeremiah's critique. A prophet who claims divine authority and produces no genuine benefit has failed at the very purpose of prophetic ministry.

7. From Divine Revelation to Human Invention

Jeremiah 23:26-32 traces a clear descent from divine revelation to human invention. Five criteria emerge from it.

Divine Origin: Authentic prophecy starts with divine origin. Jeremiah returns again and again to one question: has Yahweh actually sent or commanded this prophet? Today, the implication is that prophetic ministry must begin with divine commission. Personal ambition is no foundation. Wanting a prophetic position proves nothing about a divine call.

Faithful Communication: The prophet who holds God's דָּבָר (word/message) must speak it faithfully. Faithfulness means the messenger never manipulates the message for personal gain. Prophets are stewards. Revelation belongs to God.

Truthfulness: Jeremiah sets divine truth against תַּרְמִית (deceit) and false dreams. Prophetic ministry therefore demands intellectual and moral honesty. A prophet who does not know should never pretend to know. A personal impression should be labelled as personal and kept from masquerading as divine revelation.

Ethical Responsibility: The prophet answers for what is said and for its effects. The language of פַּחֲזוּת (recklessness/lightness) shows that prophetic speech has moral consequences.

Communal Benefit: Jeremiah ends with יָעַל (benefit/profit), placing the welfare of God's people at the centre. Prophetic ministry should nurture faithfulness, repentance, justice, spiritual maturity, hope and communal wellbeing. Fear, manipulation, dependency, exploitation and confusion are signs of failure.

8. The Challenge of False Prophecy in the Contemporary Christ Apostolic Church

The Christ Apostolic Church (CAC) has a historical identity closely tied to prayer, holiness, spiritual gifts, divine guidance, healing and prophetic ministry. These traits belong to the church's wider Pentecostal heritage. Prophecy within the CAC is therefore no problem in itself. Integrity is the challenge.

Prophecy and Personal Imagination: Jeremiah's reference to לֵב (heart) offers a significant framework for contemporary discernment. Human thoughts, expectations, desires, fears and assumptions can all be mistaken for divine revelation. A prophet may need to sort carefully between what God has revealed, what the prophet personally thinks, what the congregation expects, what the prophet has picked up from another source, and what remains genuinely uncertain. That distinction protects the prophet and the congregational members.

Dreams and Visions: Dreams and visions still feature prominently in contemporary Christian spirituality. Jeremiah's treatment of חֲלוֹם (dream) gives Christians no mandate to reject dreams. It makes discernment necessary. A dream should never become a prophecy automatically. Its theological content, ethical direction, consistency with Scripture and likely consequences all call for careful examination.

Prophetic Borrowing: Jeremiah's use of גָּנַב (steal) challenges the habit of presenting borrowed religious

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speech as personal revelation. The digital environment makes this worse, since prophetic declarations now spread rapidly across social media. Something seen online on Monday can be announced in another congregation on Sunday as a fresh word from God. Responsible ministry demands honesty about where a message came from.

Commercialisation: Money distorts. Awojobi (2018) observes that prophetic consultation in Nigerian religious settings is vulnerable to financial exploitation. Prophetic ministry bends out of shape once payment becomes attached to spiritual access or divine guidance. This concern matches Jeremiah's wider emphasis on the integrity of prophetic motive. Prophetic authority must never become a mechanism for exploiting vulnerable people.

Politicisation: Prophetic speech can also become tangled up with political interests. When prophetic authority is used to legitimise particular political actors or agendas, the ministry risks losing its independence. Jeremiah's stress on truthfulness and divine origin supplies the corrective. Prophetic speech must answer to divine revelation, and political pressure has no claim on it.

9. Prophetic Integrity and Accountability in the Contemporary Christ Apostolic Church

Re-centring Prophecy on Scripture: Biblical grounding comes first. Prophetic experiences should be evaluated in the light of Scripture. That standard leaves room for prophetic messages that go beyond quotation. What it requires is that no prophetic claim contradict the theological and ethical witness of Scripture.

Prophetic Formation: Prophetic ministry needs formation. Spiritual experience should be matched by biblical knowledge, theological reflection, ethical maturity and pastoral sensitivity. The CAC can strengthen prophetic ministry through structured theological and ministerial training.

Congregational Discernment: Jeremiah’s critique implies that discernment belongs to the whole community, and the prophet cannot carry it alone. Congregations should be equipped to ask a set of plain questions. What is the source of this message? Is it consistent with Scripture? Does it encourage faithfulness to Christ? Does it produce spiritual maturity? Is there evidence of manipulation? Does the prophet accept correction? Does the message genuinely benefit God’s people? Such questions build a mature prophetic culture.

Ecclesial Accountability: Prophetic authority should operate within accountable church structures. No prophet stands above examination or correction. Accountability can include ministerial oversight, theological education, disciplinary procedures, financial transparency, and clear mechanisms for addressing prophetic abuse.

Ethical Restraint: Last comes restraint. Jeremiah's description of פַּחֲזוּת (recklessness/lightness) shows that prophetic authority demands disciplined speech. Where certainty is absent, prophets should avoid needlessly specific declarations, above all those that may provoke fear or push people towards irreversible decisions.

10. Theological Implications for Contemporary Prophetic Ministry

Jeremiah 23:26-32 yields several theological implications. First, prophetic authority is derivative. A prophet holds authority only so far as the message genuinely comes from God.

Second, prophetic experience and divine revelation are distinct. A dream, vision, impression or spiritual experience must be discerned. Third, prophetic truth includes ethical responsibility. The prophet answers for the claim itself and for the way the claim affects the community.

Fourth, prophetic ministry requires theological accountability. Presenting a declaration as divine never

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makes it immune from examination. Fifth, the ultimate concern of prophecy is the welfare of God's people. Jeremiah's use of יָעַל (benefit/profit) makes communal benefit a central theological consideration. Finally, prophetic renewal leaves prophecy in place. It calls for a return to the marks Jeremiah associates with genuine prophetic ministry: divine origin, faithful communication, truthfulness, ethical responsibility, accountability and communal benefit.

11. Discussion: A Framework for Prophetic Discernment

The exegesis suggests that prophetic discernment works as a process. One test cannot do it all.

First, the source of a claim must be described honestly. A personal impression, a dream, an interpretation, a scriptural reflection and a direct claim of divine speech are different things, and lumping them into one category does real damage. Jeremiah's distinction between a dream and Yahweh's word (v. 28) supports transparent speech about the nature of an experience. Transparency leaves open whether an experience is spiritually significant. It stops the speaker from claiming authority that has not been established.

Second, the content of a prophetic message must be weighed against the theological and ethical commitments of the community. In Jeremiah, the rival prophets' words are never judged in a vacuum; they are measured against Yahweh's word and the covenantal demands of the book. For Christians today, Scripture is therefore a primary standard, and interpreting it requires humility, attention to context and communal reasoning. A biblical phrase glued onto a personal opinion does not make the opinion prophetic. No leader should use a claimed revelation to override moral obligations, silence questions, or shield a decision from scrutiny.

Third, the manner of communication carries ethical weight. Jeremiah's condemnation of stolen words and of tongues that announce "He says" marks misrepresentation as a grave failure. Contemporary equivalents might include passing off another minister's declaration as new revelation, circulating unverified claims as certain, or using sacred language to discourage questions. The analogy needs careful handling. Borrowing a phrase, learning from tradition or preaching a shared biblical teaching is no theft. The ethical issue is deceptive attribution: claiming a source or authority that the speaker knows, or ought to recognise, is unwarranted.

Fourth, accountability must be institutional as well as personal. Private assurances of sincerity fall short when a prophetic declaration touches someone's marriage, health decisions, finances, vocation, reputation or safety. Church leaders need procedures through which claims can be examined, harm reported and errors corrected, all without intimidation. Such procedures should separate honest mistakes from interpretive disagreement and from deliberate deception. They should also shield anyone who questions a prophetic claim from spiritual coercion. Accountability need not be hostile to spiritual gifts. It can protect the credibility and pastoral purpose of prophetic ministry.

Fifth, the outcome for the community deserves weight, and "benefit" must never shrink into a popularity contest. Jeremiah 23:32 declares that the prophets do not benefit the people. Authentic prophecy, by that same logic, need not be instantly welcome or comfortable. A prophetic word may expose wrongdoing, challenge a powerful leader or call for costly repentance. Its value to the community should be judged by truthfulness, covenantal faithfulness, justice, moral formation and the protection of the vulnerable. Emotional excitement, attendance figures, financial success and public approval are poor measures. This qualification is essential if the verse is to guide church life responsibly.

For the Christ Apostolic Church, these principles translate into practical measures:

i. sustained biblical and theological education for ministers;
ii. clear guidelines for presenting dreams and impressions;

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iii. transparent financial practice around prayer and prophetic consultation;
iv. accessible channels for pastoral complaints; and
v. regular teaching that equips congregants to test claims respectfully.

These recommendations flow from theological analysis. They are not findings from a denomination-wide empirical study. Putting them into practice would require consultation with the church's governing bodies and close attention to its own polity, traditions and disciplinary procedures.

12. Limitations and Further Research

This study is a textual and theological investigation of Jeremiah 23:26-32 with contextual application to the Christ Apostolic Church. It includes no interviews, surveys, participant observation or congregational case studies. It therefore cannot establish how common false prophetic practices are within the denomination, how members evaluate prophetic claims in practice, or how existing Christ Apostolic Church policies address particular forms of misconduct. The contextual discussion flags issues that merit theological attention. It should never be read as a measured description of all Christ Apostolic Church ministers or congregations. Empirical work is the obvious next step.

13. Conclusion

Jeremiah 23:26-32 delivers a sustained critique of prophetic speech cut off from divine revelation and ethical responsibility. The passage begins with the לֵב (heart) as the inner source of prophetic invention. It names תַּרְמִית (deceit) as the character of the message, examines the misuse of חֲלוֹם (dream), sets human speech against God's דָּבָר (word/message), exposes the גָּנַב (stealing) of divine words, identifies the misuse of the לָשׁוֹן (tongue), condemns פַּחֲזוּת (recklessness/lightness), and finally declares that such prophecy does not יָעַל (benefit/profit) God's people. The result is a coherent theology of prophetic integrity. Authentic prophecy must have a legitimate divine source, communicate truth faithfully, remain ethically responsible, and serve the genuine welfare of the community.

For prophetic ministry within the Christ Apostolic Church, Jeremiah offers a framework for discernment, and prophecy itself survives intact. Prophetic ministry should be rooted in Scripture, supported by theological formation, subject to ecclesial accountability, protected from commercial exploitation, and exercised with humility and restraint.

The slide from divine revelation to human invention happens when a prophet substitutes personal thought for divine communication, borrowed speech for genuine revelation, or personal interest for communal welfare. Jeremiah's corrective is clear. Authority must answer upward. Prophetic authority stays accountable to its divine source, to truthful communication, to its ethical consequences, and to its capacity to serve God's people faithfully.

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