

Ezekiel 13: Biblical Reading and Reflections

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 08 June 2021

Preacher: Alastair Roberts

[0 : 00] Ezekiel chapter 13. The word of the Lord came to me. Son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel, who are prophesying, and say to those who prophesy from their own hearts, Hear the word of the Lord.

Thus says the Lord God, Woe to the foolish prophets who follow their own spirit, and have seen nothing. Your prophets have been like jackals among ruins, O Israel. You have not gone up into the breaches, or built up a wall for the house of Israel.

That it might stand in battle in the day of the Lord. They have seen false visions and lying divinations. They say, Declares the Lord, when the Lord has not sent them, and yet they expect him to fulfill their word.

Have you not seen a false vision, and uttered a lying divination, whenever you have said, Declares the Lord, although I have not spoken? Therefore thus says the Lord God, Because you have uttered falsehood, and seen lying visions, Therefore behold, I am against you, declares the Lord God.

My hand will be against the prophets who see false visions, and who give lying divinations. They shall not be in the council of my people, nor be enrolled in the register of the house of Israel, nor shall they enter the land of Israel.

[1 : 17] And you shall know that I am the Lord God. Precisely because they have misled my people, saying, Peace, when there is no peace. And because when the people build a wall, these prophets smear it with whitewash.

Say to those who smear it with whitewash, that it shall fall. There will be a deluge of rain, and you, O great hailstones, will fall, and a stormy wind break out.

And when the wall falls, will it not be said to you, Where is the coating with which you smeared it? Therefore thus says the Lord God, I will make a stormy wind break out in my wrath, and there shall be a deluge of rain in my anger, and great hailstones in wrath to make a full end.

And I will break down the wall that you have smeared with whitewash, and bring it down to the ground, so that its foundation will be laid bare. When it falls, you shall perish in the midst of it, and you shall know that I am the Lord.

Thus will I spend my wrath upon the wall, and upon those who have smeared it with whitewash. And I will say to you, The wall is no more, nor those who smeared it, The prophets of Israel who prophesied concerning Jerusalem, and saw visions of peace for her, when there was no peace, declares the Lord God.

[2 : 33] And you, son of man, set your face against the daughters of your people, who prophesy out of their own hearts, prophesy against them, and say, Thus says the Lord God, Woe to the women who sew magic bands upon all wrists, and make veils for the heads of persons of every stature, in the hunt for souls.

Will you hunt down souls belonging to my people, and keep your own souls alive? You have profaned me among my people for handfuls of barley, and for pieces of bread, putting to death souls who should not die, and keeping alive souls who should not live, by your lying to my people who listen to lies.

Therefore thus says the Lord God, Behold, I am against your magic bands with which you hunt the souls like birds, and I will tear them from your arms, and I will let the souls whom you hunt go free, the souls like birds.

Your veils also I will tear off, and deliver my people out of your hand, and they shall be no more in your hand as prey, and you shall know that I am the Lord.

Because you have disheartened the righteous falsely, although I have not grieved him, and you have encouraged the wicked, that he should not turn from his evil way to save his life, Therefore you shall no more see false visions, nor practice divination.

[3 : 55] I will deliver my people out of your hand, and you shall know that I am the Lord. Ezekiel chapter 13 contains two oracles against false prophets, probably joined together because of their common theme.

In the book of Jeremiah we see the great influence that false prophets had during this period in Judah's history. As Daniel Block notes, they share a very similar outline. They begin with a preamble, in verses 2-3, and then 17-18.

Then there are the charges against the prophets, in verses 3-7, and 18-19. The announcement of judgment, in verse 8-16, and 20-23.

This can be subdivided into two parts, in verses 8-9, and 10-16, and then in verses 20-21, and 22-23. The two oracles concern first male prophets, and then female witches.

Both of these groups represent threats to the people. The false prophets are a threat particularly to the people as a whole, and the witches are a pervasive threat to individuals among the people.

[4 : 59] The false prophets are proclaiming their own imaginations, but declaring them to be according to the word of the Lord. They are foolish. They are invoking the name of the Lord in support of their prophecies, and breaking the Ten Commandments in the process.

And yet they don't think about what the consequences might be. They're following their own spirit. They're acting and speaking of their own initiative. They've seen nothing. Their visions are empty. There's no truth to anything that they are saying.

In a powerful image, they are described as being like jackals among ruins. Jackals were scavenging creatures associated with desolate places. And these prophets are such persons.

The nation of Judah, the beleaguered city of Jerusalem, the people, both those who remain in the land and those who have been exiled to Babylon, are all devastated. And yet the false prophets continue to ply their trade.

One can imagine that a number of the false prophets were deported along with other members of Jehoiakim's court. And these men continue to have an influence even in the land of exile. Back in chapter 3, Ezekiel was commanded to act as a watchman for the house of Israel.

[6 : 03] And a similar image is explored in verse 5. The task of the prophet is to go into the breaches or to heal the breaches. In a situation where the wall defending the people has broken down, he must either defend them by standing in the place where there is a gap, or he must do what he can to cause the wall to be rebuilt.

However, these false prophets, rather than standing in the breach and defending the people and ensuring that righteousness is upheld, have whitewashed over the cracks. Rather than loudly drawing attention to the failures of the moral structure of the nation, they have concealed its lack of integrity.

They have spoken as if they have the Lord at their own whim and pleasure, fancying that the Lord will act according to their lying divinations. All they have ended up doing is taking the name of the Lord in vain.

In verses 8 and 9, the Lord declares himself to be against them. They had once declared that the hand of the Lord was upon them, causing them to speak the words that they had spoken. But now the Lord's hand really will be upon them.

But his hand will be upon them to destroy them. They will not be counted among the congregation of the people. They will not be enrolled in its number. And they will not return to the land or see it again.

[7 : 15] The Lord in his judgment upon them has excommunicated them. Their statements of peace in the absence of peace merely served to disguise the deep cracks among the people.

And as a result, those cracks were not addressed. The words of faithful prophets like Jeremiah were shouted down and dismissed on account of the words of these false prophets. There is a sort of collaborative hypocrisy at work here.

The people and their rulers build an unsound society. And then the prophets come along to put the words of God as whitewash over it, to make it appear beautiful and secure when it is nothing of the kind.

In scripture, our attention is occasionally drawn to the fact that people want to believe false prophecies. In many cases, even while they know that they are false, they will persist in believing them.

The dissembling of the truth in a false appearance is desirable in itself, even when people know that the reality is masked. However, the Lord promises a storm, and in this storm the true character of the wall will be revealed.

[8 : 16] With a deluge of rain, great hailstones and wind, the unsound structure will be revealed for what it is, and will come down. The storm in question is the Lord's own wrath that will come upon the people on account of their hypocrisy and evil.

It will cut off both the society that has been whitewashed and the people who put the whitewash upon it. Their visions of false peace, condemned by Jeremiah and others, will truly be revealed for what they are.

In the second oracle of this chapter, Ezekiel is instructed to speak to the daughters of his people. These women, like the men before them, are prophesying out of their own hearts.

However, these women seem to be given to more occult practices, practices of magic that they probably picked up from the people around them in Babylon. It's likely that through black magic they are attempting to control souls of other persons.

Using magical bands and bracelets, amulets, charms, talismans and other such things, they are preying upon souls. They are profaning the Lord among his people, presumably by invoking his name in their charms and ceremonies.

[9 : 21] The barley and the bread mentioned in verse 19 are probably not the price for their services, but rather, as Marsha Greenberg argues, materials with which they will perform their rituals.

By their magical arts, these women are profaning the name of the Lord, but also trying to take his people from him. The Lord is jealous for his people, but these women are trying to capture and control them.

The Lord would rob them of their prey, and though they have invoked the name of the Lord in their magical arts, the Lord would frustrate those arts and their schemes. And as he cut off their false visions and rendered their arts ineffectual, the Lord would demonstrate his true identity.

As in verse 9, 14 and 21, verse 23 ends with a recognition formula. And you shall know that I am the Lord. A question to consider.

Can you think of examples of people falsely invoking the name of the Lord? Why do you think some people receive these messages, even when they don't truly believe them?