

AGAINST FALSE AND FOOLISH PROPHETS

A. God's word against false prophets.

1. (Eze 13:1-2) The command to speak against the false prophets.

And the word of the Lord came to me, saying, "Son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel who prophesy, and say to those who prophesy out of their own heart, 'Hear the word of the Lord!'"

a. **Prophesy against the prophets of Israel who prophesy:** Among the Jewish people of Ezekiel's time there were many false prophets, both in Israel and in the Babylonian exile. These false **prophets of Israel** mostly had an optimistic, positive message: *God will deliver Jerusalem and Judah from the Babylonians, and those already in exile will come home soon.*

i. Block sees the phrase **the prophets of Israel who prophesy** as a deliberate repetition, meant to be sarcastic. The sense is that they were always blabbing on and on with their pretended words from God.

b. **Who prophesy out of their own heart:** The source of their false prophecy wasn't necessarily directly demonic. There was simply a large element of **their own heart** in what they said. Their own desires, their own hopes, their own wisdom, their own needs for acceptance prompted their words.

i. "They were misled by their own desires, which is the scriptural method of asserting they were not inspired of God. The wish was father to the thought, and they spoke accordingly." (Feinberg)

c. **Hear the word of the Lord:** This was the fundamental message these false prophets needed to hear. They needed to stop listening to the message of their own heart, and start paying close attention to **the word of the Lord.**

2. (Eze 13:3-7) The prophets Yahweh did not send.

Thus says the Lord God: "Woe to the foolish prophets, who follow their own spirit and have seen nothing! O Israel, your prophets are like foxes in the deserts. You have not gone up into the gaps to build a wall for the house of Israel to stand in battle on the day

of the Lord. They have envisioned futility and false divination, saying, 'Thus says the Lord!' But the Lord has not sent them; yet they hope that the word may be confirmed. Have you not seen a futile vision, and have you not spoken false divination? You say, 'The Lord says,' but I have not spoken."

a. **Woe to the foolish prophets:** These self-claimed prophets were not only *false* they were also **foolish**. One reason they were **foolish** was because they regarded what came from *their own heart* and **their own spirit** to be more important than what God has said.

i. "The word 'foolish' (*nabal*) implied more than our concept of stupidity. It was a broad term that encompassed spiritual and moral insensitivity contrary to the nature of a wise man." (Alexander)

ii. "These prophets, whether in good faith but self-deluded or in bad faith and deliberately deceiving, have professed to speak the mind of the Lord when in reality no spirit other than their own moved them." (Vawter and Hoppe)

b. **Who follow their own spirit and have seen nothing:** Their message was not based on a *true* relationship with God. In that regard, they had **seen nothing**. Their message followed **their own spirit**, not God's Holy Spirit.

c. **Your prophets are like foxes in the deserts:** This probably means *jackals* more than **foxes** and *ruins* more than **deserts**. The idea is of animals that burrow among the ruins, helping nothing, adding nothing, and delighting in the destruction.

i. "These prophets of falsehood were likened to foxes in waste places, preying on the desolation around them and under- mining foundations and causing havoc everywhere. As foxes they were crafty, mischievous and destructive (cf. [Matt. 7:15](#); [Acts 20:29](#))." (Feinberg)

ii. **Like foxes:** "Cowardly, crafty, cruel, greedy...Heretics are such, and false prophets; Arius, for instance." (Trapp)

d. **You have not gone up into the gaps to build a wall for the house of Israel to stand in battle on the day of the Lord:** These self-claimed prophets also lacked courage.

Trained and courageous soldiers rush **into the gaps** along the line of battle. The false prophets did not have the courage to stand and strengthen Israel in the time of crisis.

- i. If the false prophets had received and delivered a message from God Himself, it would have given the **house of Israel** a secure place to stand when judgment came (here in this context called **the day of the Lord**).
 - ii. “The prophets had shown no courage in battle. In time of war a brave soldier would rush to any break in the defensive perimeter and defend it until the position could be secured. These prophets, however, had not ‘gone up into the breaches’ in the moral and spiritual walls of the nation.” (Alexander)
 - iii. “*The day of the Lord* in Ezekiel refers to the day of judgment which the Lord has decreed upon his people and particularly upon Jerusalem. It is to be identified here with the sack of Jerusalem in 587 bc, a day in which the storm of judgment eventually broke.” (Taylor)
- e. **But the Lord has not sent them:** This was a strong condemnation of the self-appointed prophets. To claim calling when there is none is a significant sin. They claimed to speak in the name of the Lord, but it was an empty claim.

3. (Eze 13:8-9) The nonsense spoken by false prophets.

Therefore thus says the Lord God: “Because you have spoken nonsense and envisioned lies, therefore I *am* indeed against you,” says the Lord God. “My hand will be against the prophets who envision futility and who divine lies; they shall not be in the assembly of My people, nor be written in the record of the house of Israel, nor shall they enter into the land of Israel. Then you shall know that I *am* the Lord God.

- a. **Because you have spoken nonsense and envisioned lies:** The self-proclaimed prophets actually spoke **nonsense**. It probably wasn’t immediately perceived to be **nonsense** because it sounded spiritual or at least mysterious. Yet God looked at it and said, “**nonsense**” and “**lies**.”
- b. **Therefore I am indeed against you:** Of all people, prophets should be the ones whom God works *for*. Here He promised to be **against** these self-proclaimed prophets.

c. **They shall not be in the assembly of My people:** One aspect of God's judgment upon these false prophets was for the Lord to regard them as not among His covenant people. They had no share in Israel's **assembly**, in Israel's **house**, or in Israel's **land**. This exclusion would declare that Yahweh is God (**you shall know that I am the Lord God**).

i. "These three punishments strike at the heart of what it meant to be an Israelite."

(Block)

ii. "When it was affirmed that would not come into the council of God's people, the sense is that they would lose the place of authority and respect they held among the people by virtue of their alleged calling." (Feinberg)

B. The weak wall and the storm.

1. (Eze 13:10-12) The wall that falls in the storm.

"Because, indeed, because they have seduced My people, saying, 'Peace!' when *there is no peace*—and one builds a wall, and they plaster it with untempered *mortar*— say to those who plaster *it* with untempered *mortar*, that it will fall. There will be flooding rain, and you, O great hailstones, shall fall; and a stormy wind shall tear *it* down. Surely, when the wall has fallen, will it not be said to you, 'Where *is* the mortar with which you plastered *it*?'"

a. **They have seduced My people:** The message of the false prophets was attractive and even seductive. Their message was essentially to say **peace** even **when there is no peace**. Their message was filled with hope and inspiration, packed with optimism and confidence – *don't despair, God will deliver us and we will win against the Babylonians!*

i. **Seduced My people:** "Made my people to err, both in their apprehension of their sin and danger, and of my displeasure and threats, as if all were less than it was, and there needed no repentance, or submission to the Babylonish king." (Poole)

ii. **My people:** "The expression 'my people' is found seven times in the chapter, a constant reminder to the culprits of those whom they have misled." (Feinberg)

iii. **"Peace!" when there is no peace:** "They never spoke of repentance, but guaranteed that the blessings of God were just around the corner." (Wright)

iv. “That is the essence of false prophesying. Men, who have no Divine message, but pose as though they had, seek to find favour with those to whom they speak, and so agree with them in their desires and policies.” (Morgan)

b. **One builds a wall, and they plaster it with untempered mortar:** Their seductive message looked great on the outside, but it had no true strength. It was like a **wall** built with poor materials.

i. “The false prophets were compared to those who build an unsafe wall and cover up its defects. The untempered mortar was actually whitewash, which is useless for strengthening insecure walls.” (Feinberg)

ii. “Just as an ill-built wall—of stone or brick poorly joined, not mortared, and held together only by precarious tension—can still give the impression of stability when a thin layer of plaster covers it (RSV ‘whitewash’), such has been the effect of these prophets who have produced a façade of impregnability that is totally illusory.”

(Vawter and Hoppe)

c. **A stormy wind shall tear it down:** God promised that a storm would come against this weakly build wall, and it would knock it over. When the Babylonians did come and quickly overwhelm Jerusalem, then everyone would know how false the self-appointed prophets were, that their **wall** was built with terrible materials.

i. To use the figures of building and walls, the problem with the false prophets was that their work was not *inspected* before the great storm or test came. When the storm came and the wall fell, everyone knew the message was false. The key was to do proper inspection of the “wall” before the storm came.

ii. “The daubing makes the wall look as strong as possible, but it cannot save it from collapsing before the overflowing shower of God’s judgment and the great hailstones of His wrath.” (Meyer)

iii. “As fall it will, and with a force, because made of ill mortar; and they that stand under it for shelter shall perish.” (Trapp)

2. (Eze 13:13-14) The coming storm.

Therefore thus says the Lord God: “I will cause a stormy wind to break forth in My fury; and there shall be a flooding rain in My anger, and great hailstones in fury to consume *it*. So I will break down the wall you have plastered with untempered *mortar*, and bring it down to the ground, so that its foundation will be uncovered; it will fall, and you shall be consumed in the midst of it. Then you shall know that I *am* the Lord.

a. **Will cause a stormy wind to break forth in My fury:** The power of a storm is greater than anything man-made, even in the modern world. God promised that a tremendous **stormy wind** of judgment would come to Jerusalem and Judah, and that God Himself would send it.

b. **So I will break down the wall you have plastered with untempered mortar:** God promised to **break down** the self-appointed prophets together with their man-made message.

c. **It will fall, and you shall be consumed:** The fall of their weak wall would not only mean the loss of a structure. It would take many lives with it; symbolically speaking, the wall would fall upon many people.

3. (Eze 13:15-16) God’s purpose in the storm.

“Thus will I accomplish My wrath on the wall and on those who have plastered it with untempered *mortar*; and I will say to you, ‘The wall *is no more*, nor those who plastered it, *that is*, the prophets of Israel who prophesy concerning Jerusalem, and who see visions of peace for her when *there is no peace*,’” says the Lord God.

a. **Thus will I accomplish My wrath on the wall and on those who have plastered it:** God hated the work of the false prophets and promised to destroy it. The false prophets themselves would also be judged and destroyed.

i. “The counterfeit prophets gave the people a false hope, so God gave them no hope at all.” (Wiersbe)

b. **Who see visions of peace for her when there is no peace:** The essential message of Jeremiah and Ezekiel was that judgment was on the way, and they should accept it as

God's chastening and cleansing. The false prophets had **visions of peace**, leaving God's people completely unprepared for the judgment that was on the way.

C. Against the false prophetesses.

1. (Eze 13:17-19) Against the female false prophets.

“Likewise, son of man, set your face against the daughters of your people, who prophesy out of their own heart; prophesy against them, and say, ‘Thus says the Lord God: “Woe to the *women* who sew *magic* charms on their sleeves and make veils for the heads of people of every height to hunt souls! Will you hunt the souls of My people, and keep yourselves alive? And will you profane Me among My people for handfuls of barley and for pieces of bread, killing people who should not die, and keeping people alive who should not live, by your lying to My people who listen to lies?””

a. **Set your face against the daughters of your people:** After speaking against false prophets in general, Ezekiel then specifically addressed *women* who were false prophets. This was not mere repetition. A female false prophet may have special appeal to other women as well as men.

i. “Women held a higher place in Israel than among most other nations. While there were no priestesses in Israel, the nation knew the prophetic ministry of women.”

(Feinberg) There are several examples:

- Miriam, the sister of Moses (Exodus 15:20, Numbers 12:2).
- Deborah (Judges 4:4).
- Huldah (2 Kings 22:14).
- The wife of Isaiah (Isaiah 8:3).
- Noadiah, a false prophetess (Nehemiah 6:14).
- Anna, the daughter of Phanuel (Luke 2:36).
- The four daughters of Philip (Acts 21:9).

ii. “While the expression *nebia*, ‘prophetess,’ is applied to at least five women in the OT, Ezekiel refuses to dignify his target audience with the title. At best, he allows that they ‘acted like prophets,’ but like the false prophets in the previous oracle, these women are frauds.” (Block)

- iii. “There are only a handful of passages in the Old Testament which are critical of a class of women, and this section keeps company with [Isaiah 3:16–4:1; 32:9–13](#) and [Amos 4:1–3](#).” (Taylor)
- iv. “Women are delectate; yet the prophet must set his face against them as stout agents for the devil, who hath ever made great use of them. Such were Noadiah; [[Nehemiah 6:14](#)] that apocalyptical Jezebel, Bridget Matild; those two Jezebels of New England, Mrs Hutchinson and Mrs Dyer, our recent most impudent preacheresses in London and elsewhere.” (Trapp)
- b. **Who prophesy out of their own heart:** One basic failing of the female false prophets was the same as false prophets in general ([Ezekiel 13:2](#)). They spoke **out of their own heart**, not from God and His word. It is common for people to trust their own hearts instead of God’s revelation.
- c. **Woe to the women who sew magic charms on their sleeves:** As part of their false prophecy, these **women** used symbols of **magic charms** and particular articles of clothing (**veils**) in their ceremonies.
- i. “Ezekiel’s language suggests that these were more like witches or sorceresses who practised strange magic arts (cf. [1 Sam. 28:7](#)).” (Taylor)
- ii. “We can only guess at what, precisely, were the magic wristbands and head veils created by the sorceresses.” (Vawter and Hoppe)
- iii. “In Babylonia Jewish women were selling charms and’ spells. They were ready to do anything for even a small reward, putting a curse on the innocent, and promising a long and safe life for wrongdoers.” (Wright)
- d. **For the heads of people of every height to hunt souls:** God did not regard the work of these female false prophets as harmless or innocent. God saw them as those who **hunt souls**, asking these women, **Will you hunt the souls of My people, and keep yourselves alive?**

- i. The practice of false prophetesses (and prophets) *hunting souls* has not ended. Those who seduce others with false words, with magic charms, special clothing, and other things are still among us.
- ii. “*Calmet* observes that there was scarcely a heresy in the primitive Church that was not supported and fomented by seducing women.” (Clarke)
- iii. “It is not possible that the word for soul (Heb. *nepes*) could have the meaning of a disembodied spirit: this is a totally unhebraic concept. It means the total person, the self, not just a part of him.” (Taylor)

e. **Will you profane Me among My people for handfuls of barley and for pieces of**

bread: This explains the phrase, **keep yourselves alive**. They made a living for themselves through their false words, ceremonies, and actions.

- i. **Profane Me:** “With their sorcerous invocation of the divine name, the women have degraded Yahweh in the public’s eyes to the level of the Babylonian deities and demons, who let themselves be manipulated by divination and witchcraft.” (Block)
- ii. “Bread and morsels of bread. Mercenary sorceresses! that thus make sale of their predictions to feed their hungry bellies.” (Poole)
- iii. Alexander had a different understanding of this **barley** and **pieces of bread:** “Barley and bread were also instruments of sorcery (v.19). Some have understood the bread and barley to represent the cheap payment these prophetesses would accept in return for their occult practices; but Hittite practices and later Syrian rituals demonstrate that divination was carried out with barley bread either as part of the pagan sacrificial ritual or as a means of determining whether the victim would live or die.”

f. **By your lying to My people who listen to lies:** The false prophetesses were guilty of **lying** to God’s own **people**; yet the people were guilty because they did **listen to lies**. If none of God’s people listened to false prophets, there would be much fewer of them.

i. “They had used deceptive and counterfeit means to dishearten the righteous, pulling them into their cultic snare and influence. At the same time they encouraged the wicked to disobey God’s ways.” (Alexander)

2. (Eze 13:20-21) Against the magic charms of the female false prophets.

‘Therefore thus says the Lord God: “Behold, I am against your magic charms by which you hunt souls there like birds. I will tear them from your arms, and let the souls go, the souls you hunt like birds. I will also tear off your veils and deliver My people out of your hand, and they shall no longer be as prey in your hand. Then you shall know that I am the Lord.

a. **I am against your magic charms by which you hunt souls:** The false prophetesses used their **magic charms** and ceremonies to hunt and trap vulnerable souls.

i. “The women who made use of them were not, for this prophet, carnival gypsies whom one frequents for amusement; they were practitioners of the dark arts.”

(Vawter and Hoppe)

b. **I will tear them from your arms, and let the souls go:** God promised to defeat these false prophetesses, and to rescue those trapped by their snares.

i. “God would strip them of their charms and amulets and then take His people back to their land, leaving these evil women behind to die.” (Wiersbe)

c. **Then you shall know that I am the Lord:** God promised that through the defeat of the female prophets and His rescue of those who were **prey** in their hands would reveal Himself.

3. (Eze 13:22-23) The terrible effect of the lies of the false prophets.

“Because with lies you have made the heart of the righteous sad, whom I have not made sad; and you have strengthened the hands of the wicked, so that he does not turn from his wicked way to save his life. Therefore you shall no longer envision futility nor practice divination; for I will deliver My people out of your hand, and you shall know that I am the Lord.””

a. **Because with lies you have made the heart of the righteous sad, whom I have not made sad:** The work of the false prophets (both men and women) had at least two terrible effects. Their work brought sadness to the **heart of the righteous**, and it **strengthened the hands of the wicked**. Not only were the godly discouraged, but also the wicked would not **turn from his wicked way to save his life**. The false prophets convinced them there was no need to **turn**.

b. **Therefore you shall no longer envision futility nor practice divination; for I will deliver My people out of your hand:** God promised to put an end to the false prophets. Their visions were **futility** and their ceremonies were not worship, but **divination**. God promised to **deliver** His people from their deceptions.

i. "What is unmistakable is that they degraded the name of the Lord by linking it with superstitions and magical practices." (Feinberg)