

Ezekiel 13: Prophets False and True

The main theme of this passage is the importance of upholding the Truth, and the condemnation of false prophets. The chapter commences with the direction to Ezekiel: “son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel, that prophesy, and say thou unto them that prophesy out of their own hearts, Hear ye the word of Yahweh ...” (Eze. 13:2). This is very significant, because earlier in chapter 3 of this prophecy, we read that Ezekiel was struck dumb by the Almighty, and was only permitted to speak the words that God gave to him to utter:

“... and I will make thy tongue cleave to the roof of thy mouth, that thou shalt be dumb, and shalt not be to them a reprover: for they are a rebellious house. But when I speak with thee, I will open thy mouth, and thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith the Lord Yahweh ...” (Eze. 3:26-27).

The principle is, that Ezekiel was not to reprove the nation using his own words: he could only speak the Word of God. Indeed, this is something that we should endeavour to do: “if any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God ...” (1 Pet. 4:11). Again, by contrast to those who prophesied “out of their own hearts”, Peter describes the situation of true prophets: “For the prophesy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet. 1:21). Here is the difference: false prophets seek their own glory, whereas true prophets are “moved by the Holy Spirit” to impart Divine Words, that God be glorified.

Ezekiel describes how that the false prophets “follow their own spirit”, rather than being moved by God’s Spirit. We see the contrast again in Paul’s letter to the Galatians: “This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh” and again: “if we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us not be desirous of vain glory ...” (Gal. 5:16, 25). Rather than to be led away by our own desires (Jas 1:14), we must be led by the Spirit of God, following the directions given in the Spirit-Word.

We find that the prophets, despite their pleasing smooth words, did not help the dire situation that the nation was in: “Ye have not gone up into the gaps, neither made up the hedge for the house of Israel to stand in the battle in the day of Yahweh” (Eze. 13:5). There were gaps in the walls and hedges. Normally, walls and hedges were designed for defence and protection, to keep out wild animals, and human armies. But the spiritual condition of the nation was not helped by those who only sought their own advantage.

We read of these men, that “They have seen vanity and lying divination, saying, Yahweh saith, and Yahweh hath not sent them, and they have made others to hope that they would confirm the word” (vs 6). God had not sent them, yet they ran anyway. Interestingly, the ecclesia at Ephesus were commended for putting such men to the test. The word “apostle” literally means “one sent” by God. But there were false apostles, who claimed to be sent, yet were actually impostors:

“... I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how though canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles [i.e. sent ones], and are not, and hast found them liars ...” (Rev. 2:2).

The same is true today, when men claim to have received a special commission, seeking to validate their words and deeds. But God has not sent them, just as He did not send the false prophets who blasphemously spoke in His Name.

In our age, it is common to speak of folk having different points of view. That each person is entitled to believe what they may, and their opinion is just as good as anyone else's. So leaders give their interpretation of things, which must be respected as they are men of high standing. But not so according to Scripture! This is what Yahweh pronounced against other "points of view":

"have ye not seen a vain vision, and have ye not spoken a lying divination, whereas ye say, Yahweh saith it; albeit I have not spoken?" (Eze. 13:7).

And again:

"Mine hand shall be upon the prophets that see vanity, and that divine lies ..." (Eze. 13:9).

There is no question here of having a valid alternative point of view, the "vision" of these men was "vain", and their words lies. In fact, in this chapter we are told that they "have seen nothing" (vs 3) – in other words, they were spiritually blind to the things of the Truth!

The consequence for these individuals, is stated thus:

"they shall not be in the assembly of my people, neither shall they be written in the writing of the house of Israel, neither shall they enter into the land of Israel: and ye shall know that I am the Lord Yahweh" (Eze. 13:9).

There is a principle of Scripture, that "they are not all Israel, which are of Israel. Neither because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children ... they which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed" (Rom. 9:6-8). The false prophets under consideration were children of the flesh, and would not be counted amongst the assembly of God's people, or enter into the land of Israel again, once the 70 year period of exile had ended.

Also, it is written of them: "neither shall they be written in the writing of the house of Israel". This theme is picked up several times in Scripture: those who bow down to false gods, and a particular image of blasphemy are defined as those "whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Rev. 13:8). This demonstrates the seriousness of making sure that what we believe in, and who we worship is Truth. If we bow the knee to anyone but Yahweh, we will not be written in the writing of the house of Israel, for our names will be blotted out of the book of life.

By contrast to the true prophets, who spoke of judgments and punishments for sin, the false prophets spoke of peace and prosperity. The same is true today: those who emphasise how we must prepare for a coming day of judgment are not approved of by men, but those who speak of good and plenty are honoured.

Of the false prophets, it is said that: “they have seduced my people, saying, Peace; and there was no peace ...” (Eze. 13:10). Whilst the false prophets describe the peace and liberty that the Broad Way can accommodate, the true prophets recognised the reality of the situation:

“... when they speak great swelling words of vanity, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness, those that were clean escaped from them who live in error. While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption ...” (2 Pet. 2:18-19).

The False prophets of Ezekiel’s day spoke of liberty that would come to Israel, when the Babylonian yoke would be removed. But the true prophets, including Jeremiah and Ezekiel described how there would be an extended period of servitude in Babylon, following the destruction of Jerusalem, with the restoration only taking place after 70 years. So there was a false promise of peace and liberty, the vanity of which was seen in the events that followed.

In our day, there is much talk about peace, and the various ways in which it might be accomplished. However, the Scripture describe that when they proclaim that they have it, it will end with great violence: “For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape” (1 Thes. 5:3). We must be wary of those who preach peace, yet who remain in servitude to corruption: “the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever” (Isa. 32:17). In the absence of righteousness, there can be no lasting peace – and those who say otherwise shall be exposed as charlatans, in the events that will come.

The effect of the words of the false prophets is likened to building a poorly constructed wall. It was flimsy, and it’s true weakness was obscured by an outward coating of “untempered mortar”, or whitewash. Whilst, as we saw earlier, they did nothing to heal the breaches, they instead built their own wall. But it was not well founded, and would soon come crashing down under the force of the judgments of God:

“... one built up a wall, and, lo, others daubed it with untampered mortar; Say unto them which daub it with untampered mortar, that it shall fall: there shall be an overflowing shower, and ye, O great hailstones shall fall, and a stormy wind shall rend it ... Therefore thus saith the Lord Yahweh; I will even rend it with a stormy wind in my fury; and there shall be an overflowing shower in mine anger, and great hailstones in my fury to consume it. So will I break down the wall that ye have daubed with untampered mortar, and bring it down to the ground, so that the foundation thereof shall be discovered, and it shall fall, and ye shall be consumed in the midst thereof: and ye shall know that I am Yahweh” (Eze. 13:11-14).

So, this building would fall and be demolished under the mighty judgments of Yahweh. In our day, there is much talk about the need to build up and not pull down – which is good so far as it goes. But we must be careful about what it is that we are building. Are we building a poorly constructed wall, or, to use the Master’s parable alluding back to these things, are we building an edifice on sand, or upon a rock? It is more difficult to dig down into the rock, to lay a foundation there – but it will all be worth the effort in the end.

The word of the Lord though Ezekiel accused the false prophets of lying, and giving a false promise of life:

“Because with lies ye have made the heart of the righteous sad, whom I have not made sad; and strengthened the hands of the wicked, that he should not return from his wicked way, by promising him life” (Eze. 13:22).

Again, this is the effect of false prophets: the righteous are made sad, sighing and crying for all the abominations done in the name of the Lord (Eze. 9:4), and the wicked rejoice. But that rejoicing will be short lived, for the peace it brings is only temporary and transient.

The wicked are promised life by those who claim to be sent by Yahweh. This reminds us of the origin of sin, through the temptation of the serpent: “the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as the Elohim, knowing good and evil” (Gen. 3:4-5). The path of wickedness is traversed by the majority, who know not God, yet believe that in some way there is life after death. At funerals, often the minister will send the deceased up to heaven, promising life and blessedness there. But their promise of life is to reward iniquity with immortality, which is not the Divine Way at all. Only the Truth can save, not the imaginations of those led of their own spirit, following their own heart.

Just as in Israel there were false prophets, even so it is in our own day. So it is written:

“but there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves quick destruction” (2 Pet.2:1).

The warning of Ezekiel against the errorists within Israel, is therefore applicable to our generation. We must exercise all due diligence to ensure that we believe the right things, and not be led by prominent members who are in error – remember the example of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. As we saw earlier, there is a sighing and crying (Eze. 9:4) on the part of those who behold the hypocrisy of those who crave the praise and approbation of men. But their tears of sadness shall be changed to those of joy and rejoicing when the Master comes again.

Peter recounts for our learning, the example of Lot. God “delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked: (for that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds:” (2 Pet. 2:7-9). The Lord knows how to deliver the godly (2 Pet. 2:9) from the judgment to come, and he will deliver us, if we hold fast to that which is true. We must be like “just Lot”, crying and sighing for the works of apostasy, that we might be spared in the judgments to come - according to the Grace and Purpose of our God.

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