

Ezekiel 13-14 • Quality, Not Quantity

Introduction

One of the things to understand about Ezekiel is that he's operating in exile at the same time that Jeremiah is operating in what is left of Judah and Jerusalem. God provided powerful messages to the people about the danger of the false prophets through Jeremiah, even instructing Jeremiah to write them down and send them to be read to those already in exile with Ezekiel and Daniel. Just as God's Word commanded that no one be convicted without the testimony of at least two witnesses, so through Ezekiel the message through Jeremiah was confirmed. The false prophets all prophesied peace and restoration when the true prophets conveyed the truth of God's coming judgment. The church faces the same problem today: whether to cleave to what it would like to hear, or remain steadfast to the truth of God's Word. In the end it's not about gaining significant market share, but the battle for each individual heart.

^{13:1}Then the word of the LORD came to me saying, ²“Son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel who prophesy, and say to those who prophesy from their own inspiration, ‘Listen to the word of the LORD!’ ³Thus says the Lord GOD, “Woe to the foolish prophets who are following their own spirit and have seen nothing. ⁴O Israel, your prophets have been like foxes among ruins. ⁵You have not gone up into the breaches, nor did you build the wall around the house of Israel to stand in the battle on the day of the LORD. ⁶They see falsehood and lying divination who are saying, ‘The LORD declares,’ when the LORD has not sent them; yet they hope for the fulfillment of their word. ⁷Did you not see a false vision and speak a lying divination when you said, ‘The LORD declares,’ but it is not I who have spoken?’”

[Read 13:1-7]

Q: In reality, from God's point of view, how do false prophets operate?

1. “...from their own inspiration” (v.2) They do not “listen to the word of the LORD” (v.2), but “hope for the fulfillment of their word”. They reject the Word of God for another word.
2. “...following their own spirit” (v.3) As “the LORD has not sent them”, they are not abiding in or guided by the Spirit of God, but another.
3. They “have seen nothing” (v.3) Since their revelations don't come from the illumination of God's Word by His Spirit because they've rejected both and follow substitutes, “they see falsehood and lying divination” (v.6).

Q: What illustration sums up the resulting character of false prophets because of these qualities?

A: “...like foxes among ruins”. (v.4) A fox is an unclean animal according to the Mosaic Law and represents someone whose personal gain is achieved through deceit and craftiness at the expense of others. They are symbols of spiritual destruction in the Bible.

“Catch the foxes for us,
The little foxes that are ruining the vineyards,
While our vineyards are in blossom.”
Song of Solomon 2:15

Q: What are true prophets supposed to do which the false did not?

1. “You have not gone up into the breaches”. (v.5)
2. “...nor did you build the wall around the house of Israel to stand in the battle on the day of the LORD”. (v.5)

They were supposed to call the people to repentance and accountability to God's Word in order to strengthen their spiritual protection. The “day of the LORD” is that time when the disobedient will be judged for punishment and the obedient will be judged for reward. True prophets prepare God's people for that day by establishing accountability to His Word.

Point: Jeremiah and Ezekiel were not prophets known for executing signs or miracles – they were preachers of God's Word. Those who are fulfilling this role today are those who are dedicated to not just preaching His Word, but holding us accountable to it. All others fall short of the mark where a true messenger of God is concerned.

⁸Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD, “Because you have spoken falsehood and seen a lie, therefore behold, I am against you,” declares the Lord GOD. ⁹“So My hand will be against the prophets who see false visions and utter lying divinations. They will have no place in the council of My people, nor will they be written down in the register of the house of Israel, nor will they enter the land of Israel, that you may know that I am the Lord GOD. ¹⁰It is definitely because they have misled My people by saying, ‘Peace!’ when there is no peace. And when anyone builds a wall, behold, they plaster it over with whitewash; ¹¹so tell those who plaster it over with whitewash, that it will fall. A flooding rain will come, and you, O hailstones, will fall; and a violent wind will break out.

[Read 13:8-11]

Q: What actions will God ultimately take against false prophets?

1. “They will have no place in the council of My people”. (v.9)
2. “...nor will they be written down in the register of the house of Israel”. (v.9)
3. “...nor will they enter the land of Israel”. (v.9)

In other words, they will not merely lose the status of their office or position, but they will actually lose their citizenship in God’s kingdom.

“Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven.”

Luke 10:20

‘He who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.’

Revelation 3:5

Q: What was the substance of the message of the false prophets? What did they say and do?

1. “...they have misled My people by saying, ‘Peace!’ when there is no peace.” (v.10) They told people what they wanted to hear instead of what they actually needed to know. The word for “misled” in some translations is rendered “seduced”, revealing what is really taking place.
2. “...when anyone builds a wall, behold, they plaster it over with whitewash”. (v.10) Remember, this is a wall with breaches, a weak wall to begin with (v.5). Instead of holding the people accountable to God’s Word and ways in order to repair and fortify their spiritual protection, they fill the gaps with false doctrine and teachings which hide the reality of their true spiritual condition. It’s all form and no substance. It is weak and will eventually fail.

Point: *In Ezekiel’s day, this has a literal application to the false prophets’ messages that Jerusalem would never fall and that the things of the temple already taken away would be restored. The walls of Jerusalem would literally fall. But for that time as well as ours, there is a layer of application for those who are walking by the Spirit according to His Word as opposed to those who are going after the false prophets and false teachers sending the same false message today.*

¹²“Behold, when the wall has fallen, will you not be asked, ‘Where is the plaster with which you plastered it?’”

¹³Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD, “I will make a violent wind break out in My wrath. There will also be in My anger a flooding rain and hailstones to consume it in wrath. ¹⁴So I will tear down the wall which you plastered over with whitewash and bring it down to the ground, so that its foundation is laid bare; and when it falls, you will be consumed in its midst. And you will know that I am the LORD. ¹⁵Thus I will spend My wrath on the wall and on those who have plastered it over with whitewash; and I will say to you, ‘The wall is gone and its plasterers are gone, ¹⁶along with the prophets of Israel who prophesy to Jerusalem, and who see visions of peace for her when there is no peace,’ declares the Lord GOD.

¹⁷“Now you, son of man, set your face against the daughters of your people who are prophesying from their own inspiration. Prophecy against them ¹⁸and say, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, “Woe to the women who sew magic bands on all wrists and make veils for the heads of persons of every stature to hunt down lives! Will you hunt down the lives of My people, but preserve the lives of others for yourselves? ¹⁹For handfuls of barley and fragments of bread, you have profaned Me to My people to put to death some who should not die and to keep others alive who should not live, by your lying to My people who listen to lies.””

[Read 13:12-16]

Q: What do the multiple actions of God’s judgment combine to portray when it comes to spiritual faithfulness on the day of the Lord?

A: It will be thoroughly tested from every direction: from below (“flooding rain”), above (“hailstones”), and every side (“a violent wind”).

Point: *Your spiritual foundation and every brick of teaching on which you build going forward has to measure up to God’s standards in order to pass God’s tests.*

Q: When the false are exposed, the end result is that, “And you will know that I am the Lord”? What bad thing is this actually speaking of for those thus exposed?

A: It’s a way of stating that because they have not changed their ways, they will ultimately see and know the absolute truth of their pursuit of false teaching when it is too late to do anything about it personally. They’ll know the truth too late to act on it.

[Read 13:17-19]

Q: How are the actions of the false prophetesses similar to those of the false prophets described above?

A: The false prophets substituted the Word of God and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit for false substitutes so as to seduce/mislead the people; the false prophetesses use the substitutes of “magic bands” and “veils for the heads” to seduce/mislead the people into following the wrong thing.

Point: *The false love to substitute the Word of God and true worship for things that are pleasing to the eye and can be used for show. As this study is being written, there are false prophets selling handkerchiefs to eliminate financial debt, spring water to bring financial blessings, and so on and so on. Thousands of people will show up to see what they believe to be a picture of Jesus on a tortilla who won’t actually put His Word into practice in their life.*

Q: What is the meaning of v.19 in how they profaned God by these actions?

A: Their true motive is not spiritual, but financial. Even if they were to profit millions of dollars, in the end it would only look like very meager “handfuls of barley and fragments of bread” when compared to the true, spiritual riches they have lost – and cost others -- in the process.

Q: How serious is the end result of false prophets’ activities?

A: They result in not only spiritual deception in the course of this life, but actually take lives eternally as they send people to hell.

Q: Can’t people claim that they were duped by the false prophets and therefore shouldn’t be held accountable for being deceived?

A: “...by your lying to My people **who listen to lies**”. (v.19) Every Believer has an obligation to adhere to the Truth, to test every message and messenger according to the standards of God’s Word; to do otherwise is to be culpable for accepting the lies. The Bible teaches that people are given over to deception because they continually refuse to accept the Truth and instead embrace the lie. It’s not a curse from God, but a result of one’s personal choices and behavior.

For this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false, in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness.

2 Thessalonians 2:11-12

[Read 13:20-23]

²⁰Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD, “Behold, I am against your magic bands by which you hunt lives there as birds and I will tear them from your arms; and I will let them go, even those lives whom you hunt as birds. ²¹I will also tear off your veils and deliver My people from your hands, and they will no longer be in your hands to be hunted; and you will know that I am the LORD. ²²Because you disheartened the righteous with falsehood when I did not cause him grief, but have encouraged the wicked not to turn from his wicked way and preserve his life, ²³therefore, you women will no longer see false visions or practice divination, and I will deliver My people out of your hand. Thus you will know that I am the LORD.”

^{14:1}Then some elders of Israel came to me and sat down before me. ²And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, ³“Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their hearts and have put right before their faces the stumbling block of their iniquity. Should I be consulted by them at all? ⁴Therefore speak to them and tell them, “Thus says the Lord GOD, “Any man of the house of Israel who sets up his idols in his heart, puts right before his face the stumbling block of his iniquity, and then comes to the prophet, I the LORD will be brought to give him an answer in the matter in view of the multitude of his idols, ⁵in order to lay hold of the hearts of the house of Israel who are estranged from Me through all their idols.””

Q: What is the actual result of the work of false prophetesses?

1. “...you disheartened the righteous with falsehood when I did not cause him grief...” (v.22) Whereas the truth of God’s Word is an effectual tool to keep the righteous on the right path (the meaning of God giving the righteous “grief”), the false introduce lies for the express purpose of hiding God’s correction.
2. “...[you] have encouraged the wicked not to turn from his wicked way and preserve his life”. (v.22) They lead away from the truth of God’s Word, deceiving them as to the true destination to which that path is leading which will cost them their eternal life.

Q: What is one of the purposes behind God’s working judgment on false prophets according to v.21?

A: To “deliver My people from your hands”.

Point: A major component of every revival, of every judgment of God in the past and to come, is the re-establishment of His Word.

[Read 14:1-5]

Q: What is being taught here about the true nature of false worship and following false prophets/false gods?

A: It begins with the heart.

Point: This is why it’s not just being misled, but being seduced. No one can be seduced against their will. Embracing a false teaching, false prophet, or substitute god is the **NEXT** step **AFTER** one has already chosen to follow their own desire and will over God’s.

Q: What term best describes the people to which God is here referring?

A: Hypocrite. They want to live according to their **OWN** will and ways and yet still be protected and guided by the One True God. They’re not coming to God on **HIS** terms, but their own.

Point: You weren’t supposed to go to the temple and provide a sacrifice to obtain forgiveness for sin; it was the end of the process by which you first recognized your sin, repented, prepared your heart, and publicly expressed your sorrow and determination to change by performing the temple ritual. God’s people are supposed to come to church with a right heart, not living like they want and coming to church to be absolved for their lack of faithfulness, only to go right back and out and do it all over again.

Q: What is the word God uses in v.5 which precisely describe the situation?

A: “Estranged”. This is the word we use to describe temporary separation between those who are married.

Point: You can’t “come back” to your spouse while still committing adultery with another. That’s how God views seeking Him with a divided heart.

⁶“Therefore say to the house of Israel, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, ‘Repent and turn away from your idols and turn your faces away from all your abominations. ⁷For anyone of the house of Israel or of the immigrants who stay in Israel who separates himself from Me, sets up his idols in his heart, puts right before his face the stumbling block of his iniquity, and then comes to the prophet to inquire of Me for himself, I the LORD will be brought to answer him in My own person. ⁸I will set My face against that man and make him a sign and a proverb, and I will cut him off from among My people. So you will know that I am the LORD.

⁹“But if the prophet is prevailed upon to speak a word, it is I, the LORD, who have prevailed upon that prophet, and I will stretch out My hand against him and destroy him from among My people Israel. ¹⁰They will bear the punishment of their iniquity; as the iniquity of the inquirer is, so the iniquity of the prophet will be, ¹¹in order that the house of Israel may no longer stray from Me and no longer defile themselves with all their transgressions. Thus they will be My people, and I shall be their God,” declares the Lord GOD.”

¹²Then the word of the LORD came to me saying, ¹³“Son of man, if a country sins against Me by committing unfaithfulness, and I stretch out My hand against it, destroy its supply of bread, send famine against it and cut off from it both man and beast, ¹⁴even though these three men, Noah, Daniel and Job were in its midst, by their own righteousness they could only deliver themselves,” declares the Lord GOD.

¹⁵“If I were to cause wild beasts to pass through the land and they depopulated it, and it became desolate so that no one would pass through it because of the

[Read 14:6-8]

Q: How does v.7 explain the steps an individual consciously undertakes to become a hypocrite?

1. “...separates himself from Me”. Spiritual estrangement; unfaithfulness.
2. “...sets up his idols in his heart”. The external, physical idols don’t matter because it has already become the object of desire internally.
3. “...puts right before his face the stumbling block of iniquity”. The biblical definition of iniquity has to do with reinterpreting God’s Word and twisting it into something it was never intended in order to justify one’s self.
4. “...then comes to the prophet to inquire of Me for himself”. Seeks to invoke someone else’s righteousness as a cover for their self.

Point: None of this comes about by accident but by personal choice. Those “deceived” by a false prophet were already deceiving themselves before the false prophet came along. The false prophet merely recognizes the opportunity to exploit what had already begun within each individual.

[Read 14:9-11]

Q: Why is God making this distinction? Shouldn’t true prophets pray for the backslidden?

A: The problem is that they’re not coming to the true prophet acknowledging they’re backslidden, but seeking to justify the way that they’re living.

Point: If you don’t hold someone accountable for their obvious, unaddressed sin, you’re not only giving tacit approval to their lifestyle, but actually becoming an accomplice to it.

Q: What should be the goal of spiritual accountability according to v.11?

1. “...Israel may no longer stray from Me” – They will be wholly and exclusively devoted to God alone.
2. “...and no longer defile themselves with all their transgressions” – You can substitute the word “rebellion” whenever you see the word “transgression”. In this case, their rebellion to God’s Word has made them spiritually unclean, what the Bible describes as “defiled”. This is something that can never enter into the presence and service of God.

Point: So the goal of accountability is personal reconciliation to the Person and service of God with an eye toward remaining spiritually acceptable permanently going forward.

[Read 14:12-20]

Q: What are some of the common characteristics of Noah, Daniel and Job?

1. They are righteous men, it never being recorded that they ever committed a sin.
2. They all stood alone or in a very, very small minority compared to the overwhelming unrighteousness and wickedness around them.
3. God responded personally to their prayers.
4. They all endured tremendous tests of faith.
5. Others?

Q: What might these 4 judgments represent spiritually?

1. Famine is often a metaphor for the scarceness of God’s Word.
2. The result of wild beasts depopulating the land may refer to the loss of an heir, which in Old Testament terms meant to be cut off from Israel when

Ezekiel 13-14 • Quality, Not Quantity, Page 5 of 6

beasts, ¹⁶though these three men were in its midst, as I live,” declares the Lord GOD, “they could not deliver either their sons or their daughters. They alone would be delivered, but the country would be desolate.

¹⁷“Or if I should bring a sword on that country and say, ‘Let the sword pass through the country and cut off man and beast from it,’ ¹⁸even though these three men were in its midst, as I live,” declares the Lord GOD, “they could not deliver either their sons or their daughters, but they alone would be delivered.

¹⁹“Or if I should send a plague against that country and pour out My wrath in blood on it to cut off man and beast from it, ²⁰even though Noah, Daniel and Job were in its midst, as I live,” declares the Lord GOD, “they could not deliver either their son or their daughter. They would deliver only themselves by their righteousness.”

²¹For thus says the Lord GOD, “How much more when I send My four severe judgments against Jerusalem: sword, famine, wild beasts and plague to cut off man and beast from it! ²²Yet, behold, survivors will be left in it who will be brought out, both sons and daughters. Behold, they are going to come forth to you and you will see their conduct and actions; then you will be comforted for the calamity which I have brought against Jerusalem for everything which I have brought upon it. ²³Then they will comfort you when you see their conduct and actions, for you will know that I have not done in vain whatever I did to it,” declares the Lord GOD.

one died and having no one to pass their legacy on to.

3. A sword is often an illustration of being given over to one’s enemies, of no longer having God’s protection because of unfaithfulness.
4. A plague is the most oft-repeated symbol of supernatural judgment that can only come from God.

Together they combine to illustrate the progressive levels of God’s judgment on those who allow themselves to be deceived by embracing sin. They become numb to His Word, no longer contribute to the legacy of the kingdom, and are given over to both earthly and spiritual punishments as progressively more dramatic types of wake-up calls.

Q: What is implied in how to survive such judgment?

A: Personal righteousness on the level of Noah, Daniel and Job.

Q: But what is also implied when society as a whole goes after false prophets/false gods?

A: Only individuals of extraordinary, personal faithfulness can survive.

Point: *When a group is absent of accountability to God’s Word and ways, it’s ultimate destruction is assured. Because God judges each heart, the only exceptions will be made on an individual basis. To not hold others accountable is to place yourself and everyone in the group at risk.*

[Read 14:21-23]

Q: Back in v.14 we noted that when the unrighteous finally arrive at the point, “And you will know that I am the LORD”, that it was too late for them to do anything about it. How does this contrast to the righteous remnant?

A: Because of “their conduct” – their personal behavior adhering to God’s Word and ways – they don’t simply acknowledge God’s working, but actually understand and derive comfort from it. They experience the other side of judgment, so to speak, where the right lessons have been learned and God’s character is established through them.

Q: Why might this be a comfort to a true prophet like Ezekiel?

A: At times he has expressed concerns that so few have been exempted from judgment. He would be comforted to see things as God sees them, as desiring spiritual quality over sheer numbers.

Application: *Have you considered that ministry goals might be better served by focusing on quality rather than quantity? How is it possible for smaller, quality individuals to eventually produce an acceptable quantity? (Example: Jesus’ inner 3, the 12, the 70, the 3,000 at Pentecost, etc., etc.)*

Overall Application

- What have you learned from this lesson concerning your own faithfulness? How about your commitment to God’s Word?
- What have you learned about your role in holding others spiritually accountable? For being accountable yourself?
- What have you learned about the need for accountability in your local church or ministry?