

Handout: Ezekiel Lesson 5

In Chapters 13:1-14:11, Yahweh directs His anger against three groups of people:

1. False prophets
2. False prophetesses/women fortune tellers
3. Elders in exile practicing idolatry

Chapter 13 contains a list of charges against the false prophets and two announcements of judgments:

1. Instead of speaking for Yahweh, they speak foolish words “out of their own heads” (in Hebrew, “their own hearts”).
2. They give prophecies independently; they “follow their own spirit and see nothing.”
3. They are like predatory animals feeding on the fears of the exiles.

13:3 The Lord Yahweh says this: Disaster is in store for the foolish prophets ...

Scripture uses the Hebrew word *nabal*, meaning “foolish,” for someone:

- Who is arrogant (Prov 30:32)
- Who uses crude speech (Prov 17:7)
- Who is spiritually and morally deficient (Job 2:10)
- Who is a scoundrel (Job 30:8)
- Who blasphemes God (Ps 14:1; 53:2; 74:22)
- Who indulges in foolish acts, including sexual sins and liturgical irreverence (Gen 34:7; Dt 22:21; Judg 20:6; Josh 29:23; Is 32:5-6)

The husband of Abigail is the classic example of foolishness (1 Sam 25:25) and is therefore only identified by the name “Nabal” (1 Sam 25:25).

In 13:4, Yahweh uses two comparisons to describe the perverse manner in which the false prophets conduct their self-appointed ministries:

1. They are like jackals that live in ruins.
2. They are like fortifications that have deteriorated into ruins.

According to God in 13:1-5, the true prophet’s mission had a three-fold purpose:

1. It was the prophet’s mission to protect (build a wall for) the covenant people against Yahweh’s wrath by calling them to repentance and a recommitment to obedience in their covenant relationship with God.
2. It was the prophet’s mission to intercede with God on their behalf (stand in the breach) when they failed in the hope that they would have time to respond to his message in repentance.
3. When all attempts to call the people to repentance failed, and their relationship with Yahweh was in ruins like a collapsed wall, it was the prophet’s duty to call a covenant lawsuit against an unrepentant and apostate people.

The Lord gives three punishments for the false prophets who have misled the people:

1. They will not continue as part of the congregation of the covenant people.
2. Their names will not remain in the genealogical register of the House of Israel.
3. They will never return to the ancestral land.

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These three judgments strike at the heart of what it means to be a member of God's covenant people:

1. Yahweh, His true prophets, and His faithful people form an intimate circle from which the false prophets are now excommunicated.
2. Their names appear in an official registry kept in the earthly Sanctuary and the Book of Life in the heavenly Sanctuary.
3. Faithful covenant members are heirs of the divine promises made to the Patriarchs.

In 13:10-16, Yahweh gives a detailed announcement of judgment in three parts:

1. He gives a repeat of the charges in verse 10.
2. He gives an announcement of the sentence of divine judgment on the deluded people and the self-proclaimed prophets that concludes with the recognition formula "then you will know that I am Yahweh" in verses 11-14.
3. He gives a repeat of the divine sentence with a focus on the fate of the prophets in verses 15-16.

The three-fold judgment against the idol worshipping elders in Chapter 14:8

1. *I shall set my face against that person*
2. *I shall make him an example and a byword*
3. *I shall rid my people of him*

The first judgment expresses God's total disfavor and the full force of His enmity. In the second judgment, God will make an example of the leader-idolaters. Their fate will provide evidence of God's disposition toward idolaters and motivate others not to follow their bad example. The third is literally "to cut him off from the midst of my people." The warning recalls the order of excommunication in Leviticus 20:2-6. Not only will the bond between them and their kinsmen and the land be severed, but they will also suffer an ultimate and final break with God.

The focus of 14:12-23 is the importance of individual responsibility. We cannot save our children based solely on our merits. There are two lessons in this passage:

1. In the economy of salvation, each person is responsible for his or her final destiny. Children cannot count on the piety of their parents for their salvation. Nor can a community look to the righteousness of one or two persons to deflect God's divine wrath. There is, however, hope and mercy for all persons who live committed to a righteous life by God's standards, even if they are outsiders (Rom 2:12-16; CCC 1776-77).
2. God is just in all His ways. His actions are always according to His attributes of compassion, mercy, and justice. And, when people experience His wrath, it is because "the wage of sin is death" (Rom 6:23; Ez 18:26; CCC 1006, 1008).

The Parable of the Vine in Chapter 15:

1. The first fire "on one end" of "the forest" in the Promised Land was the destruction of the Northern Kingdom by the Assyrians in 722 BC.
2. The other "end" will be the Southern Kingdom of Judah.
3. The "middle" is the city of Jerusalem.

Israel escaped the Assyrian conquest when they repented, and God saved them. However, their refusal to repent the sin of idol worship will mean God will not rescue them ("set my face against them"). They will not escape the conquest of the Babylonians, and the "fire that will devour them yet" will send the survivors out of the land and into exile.