

# EZEKIEL

## Hard to Heart

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### *“Don’t Get Plastered”*

13:1-16

I appreciate great dialog in literature or on film. I often try to complete a line and, if I can do it, I think the author or writer didn’t spend enough time on it.

While reading Ezekiel thirteen and considering the subject of differentiating between genuine and false prophets I was reminded of a great line of dialog in Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*.

The Hobbits were following Strider out into the wilderness and hadn’t yet determined if he were a friend or a foe. In the book Frodo says of him, “I think that one of [the enemy’s] spies would - well, *seem fairer and feel fouler.*”

In the sixth century the false prophets and, as we will see, prophetesses, seemed fair. They encouraged the inhabitants of Jerusalem by telling them the city and its Temple were secure.

The exiles in Babylon were encouraged they would soon be free to return to Israel.

The people should have felt the foulness of their words. The false prophets and prophetesses spoke not a word against Israel’s idolatry. It was foul of them to overlook sin, to ignore God’s moral law, and tell the people what they wanted to hear.

Meanwhile Jeremiah, back in Israel, and Ezekiel, in exile, looked 'foul' to the people. But their words were fair: They exposed the people's ongoing sin and they warned of the judgment about to fall upon them.

Ezekiel 13:1 And the word of the Lord came to me, saying,  
Ezekiel 13:2 "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!'"

God referred to these men as "prophets... who prophesy" but it's clear they were not really prophets at all. They hung out their own shingle; they appointed themselves. Since they had no calling, no gifting at all, the best they could do was "prophesy [falsely] out of their own heart."

An equivalent today would be attempting to minister God's Word without any calling or gifting from God. There are a lot of men and women who set themselves up as teachers of God's Word. They hang out their own shingle; they appoint themselves.

Now, blessedly, the consequences of listening to them, or following them, are not always as severe as in the Old Testament. After all, even if they are not gifted teachers, they may be 'able to teach,' and actually teach that which agrees with God's Word.

Still I think we ought to be careful. Because if there is any sense of self-promotion, or of ministering in the energy of the flesh rather than the Holy Spirit, then that is going to hinder the real work of the Lord in your life.

Ezekiel 13:3 Thus says the Lord God: "Woe to the foolish prophets, who follow their own spirit and have seen nothing!"

The word "foolish" doesn't refer to their intelligence but, rather, to their morality. They were not men of God troubled by the sin of the people. They were condoning idolatry and were themselves idolaters. They were foolish to think that sin was compatible with spirituality.

If you "follow your own spirit," your own desires, you're not going to see the things God is trying to show you.

Joyful submission is the price of revelation. The more I agree with God, the more He will show me about Himself and His Word.

Ezekiel 13:4 O Israel, your prophets are like foxes in the deserts.

Ezekiel 13:5 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.

Interesting mix of metaphors. The main idea is to fortify the people with the Word of God as if you were building a strong wall around them to defend them against attack.

The kind of 'wall' we're talking about is a spiritual one - giving people the spiritual fortitude they need to protect their walk with the Lord and to endure their circumstances.

By speaking falsehoods these prophets were undermining the spiritual wall that men like Jeremiah and Ezekiel were seeking to build and fortify. They were compared to "foxes." Those scavengers would find the gaps and weak places in the walls around vineyards, then crawl through them to spoil the fruit. Each ingress would weaken the wall more until a huge breach was established.

Having been spiritually spoiled the people of Israel would not be able to stand when the city and the Temple and the nation fell.

Ezekiel 13:6 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.

Ezekiel 13:7 Have you not seen a futile vision, and have you not spoken false divination? You say, 'The Lord says,' but I have not spoken."

The Lord makes it clear that He had not spoken *to* or *through* these men.

Today we have the written Word and can measure the words of men against it. It's a great advantage - provided we are willing to do it, holding fast to what is true and rejecting what is not.

Ezekiel 13:8 Therefore thus says the Lord God: "Because you have spoken nonsense and envisioned lies, therefore I am indeed against you," says the Lord God.

Ezekiel 13:9 "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.

Three punishments were determined against the foolish foxes:

1. "They shall not be in the assembly of my people." In other versions this is translated, "they shall not be in the council of my people." It means that they will lose their place of authority as those who give advice and counsel. It tells us to not look to wrong sources for spiritual advice.
2. "Nor be written in the record of the house of Israel." When the Jews were able to return to Jerusalem after the Babylonian captivity, a register was made. This was saying that these foolish, false men would not be found listed there.
3. "Nor shall they enter into the land of Israel." They would either be dead or excommunicated.

Ezekiel 13:10 "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 -

Ezekiel 13:11 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.

God considered their behavior a seduction. It's a reminder that we are in a love relationship with God and that He is spiritually jealous over us. When we begin to entertain things in our lives that are false it's like having an affair.

Next there is an amplification of the wall-metaphor. Listening to these guys was compared to building a bearing wall without mortaring it together then plastering it as if it were done. Any storm would immediately destroy it - especially one like the severe storm of judgment coming upon Jerusalem.

We are all familiar with the tragic consequences of shoddy building practices. When a magnitude 7.6 earthquake struck off the western coast of Sumatra back in October hundreds of schools were among the thousands of structures destroyed in Padang, Indonesia. Those structures were supposed to be built to standards that could withstand a magnitude 8 quake but they weren't. Widespread greed and corruption were blamed.

God promises that we can withstand any storm that comes our way.

- In Matthew 7:24 & 25 Jesus said “whoever hears these sayings of mine, and does them, I will liken to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rains descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock.”
- The apostle Paul tells us we can choose to build with precious materials that will endure and earn us reward in Heaven.

We need to build up to code to be able to withstand the most violent storm or shaking.

Ezekiel 13:12 Surely, when the wall has fallen, will it not be said to you, 'Where is the mortar with which you plastered it?' "

“Where is the mortar?” That would be a great question for an intake form prior to counseling someone! Lives fall to pieces not because of the storm but because there was no mortar holding things together.

Well, there is a kind of mortar, usually. If the people are nonbelievers the mortar is some philosophy or psychology or -ism of this world's wisdom. Those things cannot hold life together when storms and shakings come.

Ezekiel 13:13 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.

Ezekiel 13:14 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.

In the case of the Jews, the storm that was gathering was a punishment against them in the form of the Babylonian invasion.

In our lives there will be storms. They are not always, or even often, punishments. But they are severe nonetheless. We need to be storm-ready.

Some of you have lived in areas where there is extreme weather. The closest we came was when we lived in the San Bernardino mountains. Since our house was near 7,000 feet in elevation, we needed to be ready to be caught in a snowstorm while driving. Tire chains, a snow shovel, a blanket, some asphalt roofing shingles were all standard equipment in the trunk of our car.

When things are going well, we all have a tendency to coast a little. Church is important but not critical. We are open-minded to reading stuff that's not quite doctrinally sound, or to experimenting with more secular stuff.

In the church we fool around with secular skits and songs rather than focusing our hearts on that which is pure and honorable. We start looking more-and-more like the world and think it is 'cool' or edgy.

A popular trend among pastors today is to integrate foul language into their messages. Rather than give you examples, listen to what Pastor Greg Laurie said about it.

You have the "Cussing Preacher" syndrome. The pastor thinks it's cool to use profanity in the pulpit so people will see him as one of them.

Is this all really necessary? I don't think so.

Look, I have been a pastor for 35 years, and we have never had a problem reaching our culture and seeing people come to Christ. I am all for being real and authentic, but I also stand up on the platform to speak God's Word.

1 Peter 4:11 says, "If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God" (NIV).

We are also told in Scripture to watch what we say. Speaking of the tongue, James writes, "With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men who are made in God's likeness. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so" (James 3:9-10 ESV).

Let's build with the mortar that has served our spiritual ancestors so well rather than the foul swill of the world.

When something hits, it can leave us unprepared. That's why sometimes you see people crumble so rapidly when a trial hits. Their lives are like plaster over bricks that are not mortared.

It takes time to build a good, strong, level, solid wall. It's brick-upon-brick, with sufficient mortar to hold them together on all sides.

Ezekiel 13:15 "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,  
Ezekiel 13:16 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.

Don't get plastered! Don't allow yourself to build with anything other than the most precious, the most valuable, spiritual materials, and according to the master plan.