

Walk Through The Bible

*The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul;
The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple;
8The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart;
The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes;
9The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever;
The judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.
10More to be desired are they than gold, Yea, than much fine gold;
Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.
11Moreover by them Your servant is warned, And in keeping them there is great reward.
(Psalm 19:7-11. NKJV)*

*25But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.
(James 1:25. NKJV)*

Profile Of A False Prophet

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Ezekiel 13:1-16

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Introduction:

Open your Bibles this morning to Ezekiel 13. There is a connection between this text and the one we read last week in 1 Samuel 15 which seems to suggest that we will benefit from studying them in sequence. If you are tracking with the RMM reading plan then you met with this chapter on Monday of last week. Let me provide you just a little bit of background before we get into the text. Jeremiah and Ezekiel were partner prophets around the time of the Babylonian Exile and the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. Jeremiah ministered to those remaining in Judah and Ezekiel ministered to those who had been taken captive to Babylon. While their message was the same, their methods and styles were very different. Ezekiel is full of strange dreams and visions and prophetic signs and it is therefore a little more difficult to read than Jeremiah. In terms of the timeline, Ezekiel 13 would have been written sometime BEFORE the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 but AFTER the exile of the nobles in 597 BC and his call to ministry in 593 giving us about a 5 year window. Spiritually speaking, this was the time between the warning and the realization of God's wrath upon unbelieving Israel. The defeat and exile of the nobles in 597 was a warning and a wakeup call, but still, many prophets and leaders said that because of the temple and because they were the chosen people, God would not punish them further and in fact, would

quickly restore their fortunes. Good times were on the horizon, they said. Ezekiel and Jeremiah said: “Not so”. Let me read to you beginning at verse 1, dividing as we go and building together a profile of a false prophet according to the Word of the Lord. Verse 1:

Profile Of A False Prophet:

¹And 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 out of their own heart, ‘Hear the word of the LORD!’” ³Thus says the Lord GOD: “Woe to the foolish prophets, who follow their own spirit and have seen nothing!

1. False prophets operate inside the covenant community

These are “prophets of Israel” not “prophets of Baal” - these are prophets who claim to be speaking on behalf of Yahweh. One of the things that you can’t help but notice as you read the Bible is that while outside prophets and religious influences are certainly mentioned and occasionally spoken against, the greatest threat to God’s people, according to the Bible, comes from inside the covenant community. This is true in the Old Testament and this is true in the New Testament. When you find Jesus really, really angry in the New Testament, who is he angry at? The blind guy on the side of the road? The woman caught in adultery? No. He’s angry at the people who get paid to teach God’s Word. Woe to you scribes and Pharisees! You are blind guides to the blind! You are white washed tombs. You are spiritual landmines causing the damnation of yourselves and your hearers! The Apostle Paul and the Apostle John had really hard and even nasty things to say – not about the Roman Emperor, not about the pagan priests of Mithras, but against FALSE TEACHERS and FALSE PROPHETS operating INSIDE the church. One of the ways we have to wake up and grow up as modern day Christians is in discerning between true prophets and false prophets inside the church. I’ve told you before that there is nothing I get more heat for than for speaking out against false teachers inside the Christian church. People are offended when you suggest that the person they watch on TV who owns his own network, mind you, might just be a false prophet. They’ll say: “Aren’t we all on the same team? Shouldn’t we turn our guns on the atheists and Muslims instead of attacking our own?” No! The Bible says the opposite. The Bible says that the greatest danger to the church comes from inside the church and that we need to be on the watch for wolves and false shepherds above all else. If you are trying to spot a false Shepherd, the Bible says, look first in the pulpit of

your local church and if you can't find one there, turn on your TV and try the Miracle Network. You'll spot one there in no time flat. False prophets work on the inside. Second thing we see right off the bat is that:

2. False prophets speak out of personal inspiration

We see that in verses 2-3 where it says that they prophesy out of their own heart or as in the margin note there; out of their own inspiration. The Bible says that it really isn't hard to spot a false prophet, just listen to their sermon. What did they preach on? Did they preach on the Word of God – which is GOD BREATHED and useful or did they just pull something out of their own heart and mind? Was the topic: “What I Think About Social Media” or “1 John 3:1-6”? That's how you tell. This isn't rocket science. God does not call anyone to share their opinions on STUFF. He calls men to say: “Open your Bibles to page 663.” Period. That's it. The job of a pastor and leader among God's people is to READ GOD'S WORD; EXPLAIN God's Word and to help God's people APPLY GOD'S Word in all things pertaining to their lives and living. That's it. Nobody should come here to learn Paul Carter's opinion on anything. Who cares what Paul Carter thinks about anything? You should come here to hear somebody say: “Open your Bibles to page so and so” and if you don't hear that in the first paragraph of the message you should get up and walk out. Spotting a false prophet is not rocket science. You ought to be able to do it in 30 seconds or less. Verse 4:

⁴O Israel, your prophets are like foxes in the deserts. ⁵You 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.

3. False prophets are motivated by personal gain

The language here is very colourful and visual. Ezekiel says that the false prophets are like foxes who make their homes in the ruins of a city. The city is being reclaimed by the desert sands but the foxes are glad for the ruins because it represents shelter and opportunity for them. False prophets are like that, Ezekiel says, they make their home in the RUIN of God's people. Listen church, false prophets thrive in the weakness and ruin of the church. They can't survive in eras when people know their Bibles and when people trust in the authority of their local leadership.

They thrive in ignorance and they thrive in distrust. Many – not all, but many of the false prophets today thrive on TV because nobody knows their Bibles well enough to spot horse apples when they are being served to them and everybody is suspicious of authority now and assumes that their elders are out to get them. That is just the sort of scenario that spells dollar signs to the false prophets. Golden toilet seats and Rolls Royces are a little harder to come by in times when people trust their elders and read their Bibles.

⁶They 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. ⁷Have you not seen a futile vision, and have you not spoken false divination? You say, ‘The LORD says,’ but I have not spoken.”

⁸Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: “Because you have spoken nonsense and envisioned lies, therefore I *am* indeed against you,” says the Lord GOD. 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.

4. False prophets are undiscerning, indiscriminate and unregenerate

God says that it isn't that these prophets have seen nothing, it is that they have had foolish visions and false dreams. Some of them no doubt really think that God has spoken to them but they are DECEIVED. God has put his assessment of these folks out on the table from the start. He is not building up to a verdict, in fact in verse 3 he says: “Woe to the FOOLISH prophets”. The word that he uses there is the plural of the Hebrew word *nabal* which means “fool” or “wicked” and actually refers back to the character Nabal as met in 1 Samuel 25. Do you remember Nabal? Nabal was a wicked fool who because of his greed and nastiness could not see what God was doing, he did not see that David was God's anointed and he did not see that God had been blessing him through David. So he insulted David and he invited the wrath of Messiah. Ezekiel is saying that these prophets are that kind of fool. They are undiscerning and they are exposed to the wrath of God. He literally says that their names are not written down in the record of Israel. To be “not Israel” is to be not saved. To have your name blotted out of the book means the same in the Old Testament as it does in the New Testament and it is not good. The Bible is very clear on this: to be that deceived is convincing evidence that you are not saved. Ignorance is culpable, especially when you share it with others.

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*—¹¹say 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. ¹²Surely, when the wall has fallen, will it not be said to you, 'Where *is* the mortar with which you plastered *it*?'”

There are a couple of things we can draw out of these verses; first of all we see that:

5. False prophets offer false assurances of peace and salvation

They say “Peace, peace” when there is no peace. This is one of the many places where Jeremiah and Ezekiel are singing in perfect harmony; Jeremiah 6:14 says:

They have also healed the hurt of My people slightly,
Saying, ‘Peace, peace!’
When *there is* no peace. (Jeremiah 6:14. NKJV)

False prophets offer cheap assurance! They say: “Just raise your hand at the campfire and think a warm thought about Jesus and you will be saved forever!” They say: “Just make a decision right now, to love Jesus and you will be in heaven forever.” Where is that in the Bible? Where does it say anything even close to that? False prophets tell you that everything is ok, that God is all grace and he only wants to bless you and give you your best life now but where does that come from? Where did you get that message? From God? From the Bible? Or from your own sentimental fantasies? False prophets want to calm everyone down, false prophets want to be thought of as positive and happy, false prophets smile a lot. But Jeremiah was a weeping prophet and Ezekiel lay outside his house in a near coma for over a year and Jesus was called a man of sorrows. Woe unto you when everyone enjoys your message and goes home feeling safe.

6. False prophets fail to confront the root sin of God’s people

The prophet uses the analogy of white wash to say that the false prophets look at a wall about to tip over and instead of inspecting the foundations they apply a coat of paint. They say light, fluffy, mind numbing nonsense when the world is about to go to hell in a hand basket.

A few weeks ago I had to call in a plumber from our church, Mike Robertson to fix a problem with our upstairs toilet. We learned about this problem when a chunk of thick white paint, almost

the size of a dinner plate, fell to the floor in our downstairs bathroom. When we first moved into the house I noticed that there was a patch of the bathroom ceiling downstairs that was very thickly painted and I wondered about that but didn't do anything about it. Then a few weeks ago a big chunk of it fell to the floor and I understood. The previous owners had obviously covered up a water leak just prior to our visiting the house to inspect it. Rather than fix the problem they painted over it – really thick. The root problem was that the toilet seal on the upstairs toilet was broken and needed to be replaced and the toilet was slowly dripping water – maybe one drip every flush, but over time it was rotting the ceiling. Now, rather than simply re-paint the hole, I ripped it out, called Mike who replaced the toilet seal and solved the problem once and for all. That's what you are supposed to do. Had I just painted over that again, the whole ceiling would have rotted and filled with mould. Painting over a problem actually stores up more trouble for another day and that is exactly what these false prophets were doing. They failed to attack the root of the problem. They didn't want to get dirty. Preaching on sin is dangerous. It makes you sound negative. People like happy pastors who tickle their ears while the church burns down. But pastors who do that leave people to rot in their sins and they store up massive trouble for future days.

We also learn from these verses that:

7. False prophets tend to disregard the wrath of God

These prophets, God says in 10-12, never planned on the storm of God's wrath. They assumed that God wasn't like that, that he was all grace. They assumed that in the end, the love of God for his people would triumph over the concern of God for his own holiness. Fools and false prophets have always made that mistake. God has never had to choose between his holiness and his love. Only a fool teaches that love wins. The truth is GOD WINS. God always has a plan that shows forth BOTH HIS HOLINESS AND HIS LOVE. God showed himself HOLY in the destruction of Jerusalem and he showed himself LOVING in the preservation of a remnant. False prophets never seem to see that coming.

¹³Therefore 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. ¹⁴So 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.

8. False prophets leave people unprepared for the coming of the Lord

Regardless of what the false prophets say about God, he comes and when he comes, he comes in judgment. The coming of God, generally in the Bible is not a universally pleasant thing. In the Bible generally, there is the sense that God is at a distance because of the sinfulness of man – that God understands that if he should dwell with us, his holiness would consume us because of our sinfulness. That is why Moses goes outside the camp to meet with God; that is why the High Priest enters the Holy of Holies once a year and that only with a rope tied around his waist and with the blood of the sacrifice splashing all around. The presence of God is not an easy thing! That is why the ministry and mediation of Jesus is so spectacular and significant. It is only because of the blood of Jesus Christ upon the cross that we can look forward to the coming of God. When God comes, if you are wearing the robe of righteousness that is the blood of Jesus Christ then it will be a glorious day, but if you are not, it will be a horrible day – dreadful beyond imagining. Jesus himself taught that; he told a parable once about the coming of God and he said it would be kind of like a wedding feast and everyone would be gathered in to stand before the King:

¹⁰So those servants went out into the highways and gathered together all whom they found, both bad and good. And the wedding *hall* was filled with guests.

¹¹“But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment. ¹²So he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?’ And he was speechless. ¹³Then the king said to the servants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, ¹⁴take him away, and cast *him* into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ (Matthew 22:10-13. NKJV)

Jesus himself says that if God comes and you are not prepared you will be cast into hell where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Do you understand that my friend? Love doesn't win. Hell is real. And the false prophets in every age leave their hearers unprepared for the utter finality and dreadfulness of God's coming. Listen to how that day, the day of judgment, the LAST DAY is described in the New Testament:

¹¹Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. ¹²And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before ¹³God, and books were

opened. And another book was opened, which is *the Book of Life*...¹⁵And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire. (Revelation 20:11-15. NKJV)

My friends, I sometimes feel so out of step with this culture – I sometimes feel very unCanadian because Canadians are supposed to be nice, Canadians are supposed to be polite, Canadians are supposed to be even-keeled and less emotional than our crazy American cousins who fire off their guns and preach hell fire and brimstone, but I can't be unemotional about this. I can't "politely disagree with my learned colleagues among the prophetic guild" – this is life and death for me! This isn't just me being cranky, this isn't professional jealousy – this isn't me being bugged that few people outside of Orillia read my books but anytime these jokers write a recipe it sells 50 000 copies in Canada – this isn't about that! This is about the fact that when we fail to talk to people about sin, when we fail to tell the whole truth about who God is then we leave people unprepared for Judgment Day. We send people into the depths of hell with our greed based, narcissistic, fantastical, fear fueled LIES! This is serious business. I know it's almost impossible to get Canadians to believe that anything is serious business but this is. These folks are not on our team and they are damning men and women to hell with their lies and their silliness and I can't be polite about that.

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, 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. (Ezekiel 13:1-16. NKJV)

9. False prophets are exposed and shamed at the coming of the Lord

God says that one of the immediate effects of his coming is the utter destruction of the wall – the weak, flimsy defences that self-deceived people erect – and the false teachings that have been smeared onto them in support. God says that when he comes he will shake everything and only the REAL WILL REMAIN! Now when the Bible uses the phrase “the coming of the Lord” or “the day of the Lord” it generally means an extended season of wrath and judgment that ushers in an altogether new era in the life of God's people. So in Ezekiel it is referring to the coming war with Babylon, the coming siege of Jerusalem, the coming destruction of Israel as a political entity and the coming and much enlarged exile of the remnant. He was talking about an extended period of wrath that would usher in a totally new reality for God's people. Gone are the days of the kings. Gone is Israel as a nation. Gone is the temple. Gone are the sacrifices. It's all gone.

We start over and we start new. And so it was. What is interesting to note is that historically, the Babylonian exile was a life changing event for Israel in many ways. Israel never again struggles with idolatry and syncretism after the exile in anything like the way she does prior. Israel begins to organize around the Torah instead of the temple. Even though the temple is rebuilt in later years, it never dominates religious life again the way it had during the first temple era. The false prophets who had prophesied peace and blessing disappear utterly from the scene. They were exposed as fools and they lost their hold on the minds of God's people.

These lesser comings are held up in the New Testament as anticipations of the final coming. The final coming too will shake all things and cast down all idols and expose all foolish beliefs. Let me make a prediction. When the wrath of God begins to fall on North America it will empty the churches that teach the prosperity Gospel. It's going to be real hard to respect a guy who said that we were going to get our best life now when the wrath of God begins to fall on this earth, particularly since the Bible says that judgement begins with the house of the Lord. That message is going to look real hollow in the opening days of God's wrath. It will also empty the churches that no longer believe in God's wrath, that goes without saying. What it will not do is empty the churches of those who still believe and still speak about the God of the Bible. It is to those churches that people will flock and cut to the heart they will say as on the day of Pentecost:

"Men *and* brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37. NKJV)

And we will answer them as Peter did, saying:

"Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 2:38. NKJV)

We'll tell them that they need to repent. We'll tell them that sin really is the problem and that if they do not accept what God offers them in Jesus Christ then they will stand unprepared before the Judgement Seat of God. But if they do repent, and if they do accept grace in Jesus Christ then they will be filled and sealed with the Holy Spirit, marked as God's own people against the Coming of the Lord in Judgement. That is the Gospel that will need to be spoken in advance of that day; indeed it is the Gospel that is needed in every day, for who can know when the Lord will come? Jonathan Edwards famously said that the day of the Lord could come at any time for us personally. We walk through life as though on a net with hidden holes unseen. At any

moment we might slip through a hole – at any moment we might have a heart attack or get hit by a bus and we may find ourselves as sinners in the hands of an angry God. Will you be ready?, he asks. Will you be ready?, Ezekiel asks. O God! Teach us to number our days.

Plan To Protect:

I mentioned off the top that there is a connection between this passage and the one we looked at last week in 1 Samuel 15. Last week we learned that God is holy, he punishes sin and he requires that we hear and obey his Word. We also learned that because of our pride, greed and fear we are utterly unable to do so. That by itself is obviously quite a problem. That by itself explains why we need a Jesus. When a holy God requires you to do something that because of sin you are unable to do you have a problem to which Jesus is the only solution. But Ezekiel 13 actually suggests that our problem is even worse than that. Not only does sin incline us towards a misreading or a disregarding of God's Word – in addition to that, Ezekiel 13 says that there is no shortage of people inside the covenant community who are more than happy to lie to us about who God is and what he requires of us. Woe are we! We want to believe in lies and there is no shortage of people who are lying to us inside the house of the Lord! So what hope do we have? What is our plan to protect us from this additional hazard of false prophets? Well the bulk of the answer we talked about last week: We need Jesus. We need the new heart that only Jesus Christ can give us. We must be born again so that we can be forgiven, cleansed and filled with the Holy Spirit enabling us to hear again the voice of God saying: "This is the path, walk ye in it." But God gives us more than that because the devil can dress himself up as an angel of light. The devil can deceive us and make us think we are being led by the Holy Spirit when in fact we are not. So God also gives us something external to us – he gives us his written Word. The internal calls out to the external; and vice versa, and keeps us in the way of truth.

Listen to me friends, if you are truly born again, if you have REPENTED of your sins – that is you have turned your back on sin, you have come to HATE IT and to understand its danger and you have REJECTED EVEN THE SMELL OF IT – if you have done that and you have trusted in Christ and you are filled with the Holy Spirit then you must now feed on the word of God. Accept no other content. If the pastor does not say "Open your Bibles to so and so" in the first 2 minutes of his message, get up and walk out. You need God's word. We are inclined to believe in lies and so we cannot survive the voice of liars whispering in our ears: "Peace, Peace" when

there is no peace. Your plan to protect is simple: Get saved and feed on God's Word. That is your only defence against the wickedness of your own heart and the foolishness of false prophets. This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.