

Ezekiel 13A

- The Lord said Israel was a rebellious house, making excuses for ignoring the word of the prophet
 - And we're in the midst of a study of these excuses
 - And we're watching how the Lord responds to each one
 - Refuting them by rendering them void
 - It reminds me of the wife who rendered her husband's excuse void

A husband came home from work and his wife walked up to him and slapped him across the face, "What was that for?" he cried.

His wife fumed, "I found a piece of paper in your pocket with the name Jenny on it."

The husband replied, "I bet on a race last week, and Jenny was the name of the horse!"

The wife looked embarrassed, "I'm so sorry!"

The next day his wife hit him again as soon as he walked through the door.

The husband shouted, "What now?"

The wife said, "Your horse is on the phone."

- The two excuses we studied last week were kissing cousins with one another
 - The first excuse denied that the prophets could be trusted since their predictions never come to pass...yet we know this wasn't true
 - The second excuse acknowledged the prophet's spoke truth, but the fulfillment of those prophecies was so far in the future there was no point in considering them
 - I called these two excuses denial and delay
- But as we also learned last week, false prophets operated among the people contributed greatly to their cynicism and doubt
 - These men spread false predictions that never came true
 - God never sanctioned them to speak nor gave them vision to know the future

- They plied their corrupt trade for the praises of men rather than the approval of God
- And in the end, they gave and already rebellious Israel the proof they needed to ignore the word of God
- Last week in chapter 12, the Lord accused these men of flattering divination
 - They told people what they wanted to hear, collected their payment from grateful victims and then moved on
 - And because their prophecies inevitably proved false, they undermined the people's trust in God's word
 - So that soon, Israel couldn't (or wouldn't) distinguish between the true prophets and the false ones
- Because false prophets were eroding trust in the word God, the Lord promised He would act to remove this cancer from among His people
 - And today in chapter 13 we learn how the Lord deals with these men
 - In the course of our study, we also come upon the third excuse in this section
 - This excuse is a little buried in the events of the chapter, but we'll find it easily enough when we get to it
 - But first, let's see how the Lord beings to deal with this cancer of false prophets

[Ezek. 13:1](#) Then the word of the Lord came to me saying,

[Ezek. 13:2](#) “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!

[Ezek. 13:3](#) ‘Thus says the Lord God, “Woe to the foolish prophets who are following their own spirit and have seen nothing.

[Ezek. 13:4](#) “O Israel, your prophets have been like foxes among ruins.

[Ezek. 13:5](#) “You 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.

[Ezek. 13:6](#) “They 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.

[Ezek. 13:7](#) “Did 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?”

- The Lord confronts these posers by calling them out publicly
 - In v.2 the Lord describes them as those who prophesy from their own inspiration
 - That's a ways of saying they don't speak with the inspiration of God
 - A true prophet is a man (or woman) speaking under the inspiration of the Lord
 - They communicate things that could not be known by mere men apart from a revelation of the omniscient God
 - In that way, a prophet's own words validated the authority of their office
 - If a prophet was false and his prophecies were not inspired, his con would become evident soon enough
 - Eventually, he would be shown to be a liar when his prophecy failed to come to pass
 - On the other hand, when man spoke under the inspiration of God, and his predictions did come to pass, he would be validated before the people by the accuracy of his prophecy
 - In fact, the Lord often gave His prophets near-term visions to relate to the people to legitimize his office
 - False prophets were *not* inspired by God in this way, so they had only their own inspiration to guide their prophecies
 - Which was worthless, of course
 - Everything they predicted was completely made up in their own heads
 - Or to borrow from Nehemiah's retort to the men who lied about his motives in rebuilding the wall around Jerusalem:

Neh. 6:8 Then I sent a message to him saying, "Such things as you are saying have not been done, but you are inventing them in your own mind."

- Notice in v.2 that the Lord's first command to such men was to listen to the word of Lord (which is the solution to every problem, really)

- If these men truly had a heart to serve the Lord, they would have focused on learning *from* God rather than pretending to speak *for* Him
 - If they had devoted themselves to a study of God's word, they could have at least spoken from an informed point of view
 - They could have benefited from the inspiration God has already revealed in scripture
 - So even though they weren't gifted by God to receive special revelation, at least they could have shared godly insight with Israel
 - But they didn't care for the truth of God's word, so they gave no attention to it
 - They preferred the attention of the people and the power they derived from claiming to be one who spoke for God
- False prophets and false preachers only thrive among people who place too much emphasis on receiving special revelation from God and too little emphasis on understanding the already revealed word of God
 - Though they have the full counsel of God's word and though the Bible itself tells us that should be our focus, still some feel it's not enough
 - So they seek for a sign or wonder or a supposed prophet, because they want to be the exception to the rule
 - So naturally come false prophets to tell us what we want to hear, that the Lord has a specific word for us!
 - The more God's people seek for such, the more false prophets are ready and willing to serve it up
 - But we already have so much revelation from God, to say nothing of His ordinary revelation in the world around us
 - If we would only take advantage of what He's provided, we could never exhaust His wisdom or power
 - We wouldn't think to demand something special and unique, because we would be too busy marveling at what has been provided
 - And God says that if the false prophets had done that themselves, then at least they might have had something of value to offer the people

- But perhaps the Lord is admonishing the false prophets to read the word of God in the hope they would discover the penalty God assigns in His law for those who give false prophecies

Deut. 18:20 'But the prophet who speaks a word presumptuously in My name which I have not commanded him to speak, or which he speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.'

Deut. 18:21 "You may say in your heart, 'How will we know the word which the Lord has not spoken?'

Deut. 18:22 "When a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which the Lord has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.

- If a man speak presumptuously as if from the Lord when he wasn't commanded to speak by God, then the Law said he shall die
 - But how would Israel know that a man was speaking falsely?
 - So the Lord gave Israel a test that every prophet must pass
 - The test was that if any prophecy a man spoke failed to come true – even just once – then that man is deemed a false and he should die
 - The people should not be afraid of him, because he is nothing
- God's standard for determining a true prophet tells us something about the way true prophets operate under divine inspiration
 - When God chooses a person to speak His word and gifts that person with supernatural insight, the Lord also promises He will maintain perfect control over that person's tongue
 - So that whenever the person claims to be speak for God, he will be under God's direction and therefore will never prophesy in error
- So the expression of the prophetic gift would never be a hit-or-miss affair
 - God would never allow someone He called as a prophet to make a mistake, because that would undermine the people's trust in God's word
 - So if the prophecy of a person claiming to be a prophet fails to come true, Israel should know this man was not a prophet

- He was *never* called by God
 - So that even if some of his past predictions seemed to come to pass (whether by luck or otherwise), it didn't matter anymore
 - Because if the man was wrong even one time, he proves he is a fraud, always was a fraud and always will be a fraud
 - His record of prophecy must be rejected entirely and he must be silenced
- So the Lord made it easy for Israel to distinguish between true and false prophets
 - If only Israel had paid attention to the word of God, they never would have been taken in by these charlatans
 - So as I said, it all comes back to that, doesn't it?
 - Do we turn to the word of God for our guidance and authority?
 - And do we apply what it says?
 - Or do we ignore it, get taken in by crafty lies, and make the same mistakes over and over again
 - So now the time has come for the Lord to judge these men for their lies, as He promised Ezekiel and the exiles He would
 - In v. 3 the Lord pronounces woe against these men
 - The word woe in the Bible is an expression of divine judgment
 - It's sometimes translated "alas"
 - It's like the expression a courtroom of observers might make after hearing a judge hand down a verdict of guilty
 - So the Lord is condemning them for their crimes
 - The Lord describes these men's crimes in vs.4-7
 - He describes them as like foxes or jackals scampering among ruins
 - Foxes make homes in rubble by finding crevices to hide in
 - It's a description of how these men were taking advantage of Israel's situation in exile

- They were preying on the people's fears and worries and desperation to hear a good word from God
- These scoundrels made a home for themselves in the rubble of Israel's ruin
- In v.5 the Lord indicts them for not standing in the breaches of those metaphoric walls preventing them from falling rather than taking advantage of their fall
 - The Lord is asking where were these men, who claim to be building up the house of Israel in exile, when Israel needed spiritual guidance before they came under judgment
 - The city of Jerusalem fell under God's judgment because of Israel's idolatry and abominations, as we learned in earlier chapters
 - Had these men been true ministers of God, they would have worked to end the idolatry and to remove the abominations
- Instead the false prophets were taking advantage of the exiles telling them sweet sounding stories that weren't true
 - In v.6 the Lord says the people were hoping for the fulfillment of their false predictions
 - The people placed their hope in those lies but their hopes were going to be dashed in the end
 - In that way, these men were making a bad situation even worse
- Then in v.7 the Lord brings His judgment against these men, saying did you not lie when you said the Lord spoke to you when I didn't speak to you?
 - Therefore, the Lord says, I am set against you
 - The Lord will be their enemy
 - And when the Lord is your enemy, there is no one who can save you
 - The Lord pronounces His sentence against these men in vs.8-9, and it's very harsh

Ezek. 13:8 Therefore, thus says the Lord God, “Because you have spoken falsehood and seen a lie, therefore behold, I am against you,” declares the Lord God.

Ezek. 13:9 “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.

- First, the Lord says these men will no longer have anything to say to God’s people
 - He will silence these men
 - And as we’ll see, He will accomplish this by putting them to death through the very circumstances that they deny are coming
- Secondly, in v.9 the Lord says the names of these men will no longer be recorded in the registry of the house of the Lord
 - The Lord is saying these false teachers will lose their citizenship in Israel
 - And because they lose their citizenship, they will be denied the right to return to Israel after the exile ends
- Jewish identity was carefully guarded in Israel
 - The Jewish people were scrupulous in determining Jewish identity and verifying such claims
 - Generally speaking, in Ezekiel’s day a person was considered Jewish if the father was Jewish
 - And the father’s Jewish identity was determined in a similar way, that is according to his father’s identity and so on back to Jacob
 - In order to verify claims to Jewish identity, it was necessary to maintain genealogical records for all Jewish families
 - These records were the legal proof of a person’s family identity
 - These records were kept in the temple building and could be checked when necessary to verify family or tribal identity
 - That’s one of the reasons why the genealogy that begin’s Matthews Gospel is so important

- It was written before the temple's destruction, so Jesus' genealogy could have been easily verified in that day
- So no one could dispute Matthew's record of Jesus' family line to David
- When the city of Jerusalem was taken by Babylon and the temple destroyed, those family records were carried into exile as well
 - During the years of exile, the Jewish leaders did their best to maintain these records as families continued to grow while in captivity
 - While most Jews remained pure while in exile, some chose to marry foreigners forfeiting their Jewishness
 - And in other cases, some family records were lost in the turmoil of the exile which meant these families could no longer vouch for their Jewish identity
 - These records became especially important when the exiles returned to the land 70 years later
 - As Ezra sought for men to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the city and temple, he ensured only true Jews were permitted to participate
 - If a Jew couldn't prove their Jewish identity, they were excluded from the commonwealth of Israel and from the work of rebuilding
 - We see this situation reflected early in Ezra's book

[Ezra 2:58](#) All the temple servants and the sons of Solomon's servants were 392.

[Ezra 2:59](#) Now these are those who came up from Tel-melah, Tel-harsha, Cherub, Addan and Immer, but they were not able to give evidence of their fathers' households and their descendants, whether they were of Israel:

[Ezra 2:60](#) the sons of Delaiah, the sons of Tobiah, the sons of Nekoda, 652.

[Ezra 2:61](#) Of the sons of the priests: the sons of Habaiah, the sons of Hakkoz, the sons of Barzillai, who took a wife from the daughters of Barzillai the Gileadite, and he was called by their name.

[Ezra 2:62](#) These searched among their ancestral registration, but they could not be located; therefore they were considered unclean and excluded from the priesthood.

- You can see how families were being excluded from the priesthood

- And other were excluded even from joining the exiles at all, because their names weren't found in the registration
- Back to Ezekiel, we now understand what the Lord was saying to the false prophets
 - When the opportunity arises for the false prophets and their families to go home, they won't be able to return, the Lord says
 - The Lord is literally going to separate them from the Jewish people by erasing their Jewish birth records
 - Somehow, their names will mysteriously disappear from the rolls
 - As a result, the false prophets will never return to the land of Israel again
 - In this way, the Lord ensures that when the remnant of Israel returns, it will return without the scourge of these men
- Now at this point, we reach the third excuse that held back Israel's obedience to the word of God gave Ezekiel
 - But the excuse is subtle, so it's a little hidden in the text

Ezek. 13:10 "It 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;

- The third excuse is found here in v.10, as the Lord repeats what the prophets have been saying to mislead the people
 - Specifically, the prophets were declaring that the future of Jerusalem would be one of peace
 - When in reality, what was coming for that city was not peace at all
 - Instead, the city would see the fulfillment of all disasters the Lord has been promising through the true prophets
 - And the people believed this report
 - So the third excuse was claiming that Ezekiel had been superseded by other prophets

- Ezekiel has been predicting woe, but now other prophets are predicting peace
- So it looks like God revised His prediction, issued an update, and so we'll be ok after all...just a false alarm
- Undoubtedly, we can assume there were multiple voices giving positive predictions of peace (i.e., flattering divination)
 - While on the other side, there were just a couple of men (Jeremiah & Ezekiel) saying otherwise
 - Faced with the choice of believing a minority negative report vs. a majority positive prophecy, the people chose the positive
 - And perhaps they took confidence in the fact that the majority of voices were against Ezekiel
- As we saw with the earlier excuses, the truth was not hard to see, had the exiles been truly interested in the truth
 - First, the failures of false prophets must have been evident by now
 - Israel must have noticed that these flatterers were usually (if not always) wrong in their predictions
 - And so the people should have had the good sense to reject their predictions concerning Jerusalem no matter how positive
 - Secondly, if these people had turned to the word, they would have realized how demanding God's standard was for a prophet
 - They could have measured the performance of these false prophets and discovered they weren't able to meet the test
 - And as a result they could have dismissed them and ignored them
 - Instead, they ignored the word so they could cling to a hope in something they preferred
 - Thirdly, they could have seen how accurate Jeremiah and Isaiah had been in their predictions and known to trust them
 - Those men predicted the conquering of the city and it came to pass

- And so when they predicted yet further destruction, Israel shouldn't have doubted
- In the second half of v.10 the Lord describes the work of the false teachers as like plastering over a wall with whitewash
 - In this metaphor the wall represents Ezekiel's prophecies concerning what will happen to the defenses of Jerusalem
 - Ezekiel has said the walls of the city and all that were within them would be destroyed
 - The Lord compares that prophecy to an ugly, decaying wall
 - To something rotten and soon to fall
 - But the Lord says false prophets were telling a different story, a lie intended to make the people feel better about the future
 - They were like men plastering and whitewashing over Ezekiel's rotten walls
 - They took the hard truth of God's coming judgment and they painted over it to make it look better
 - But underneath that whitewash is the same rotten wall
 - Though it suddenly looks better, the reality hasn't changed
 - The wall is still destined to fall and it won't be saved by a little paint and plaster
 - What a great picture of how false prophets work
 - They start with something God has said or done but then they cover it over with a thick coat of lies
 - They whitewash it, so to speak, so that it's unrecognizable to a true student of scripture
 - But to the ignorant or immature, it's all the more attractive and alluring
 - Nevertheless, in the end the whitewash is destined to crack and fall away, because only the word of God stands the test of time
- We will return to this passage next time to see how God exposes these liars, but before we end today, I have to ask have you used this excuse?

- Have you ever given preference to a false teaching over the truth in the Bible simply because the lie sounded better than the truth?
 - You may say no but ask yourself this...
 - When you hear Bible teaching or when someone offers you a perspective on the Bible, *how* do you know if they are speaking truthfully?
 - The obvious answer is we should compare their teaching to the Bible so you can double check what they say
 - But many of us are too unfamiliar with what the Bible teaches to do that homework (and others are simply lazy)
- So uninformed or immature Christians will simply guess, and usually they chose to believe whatever sounds better to them
 - I think many of the doctrinal disputes that divide the church exist because of this excuse working in our thinking
 - We prefer what sounds better to use, and we discount any teaching to the contrary
 - Keep in mind, the Bible is perfectly clear about every major doctrine of our faith, including those doctrines that are often in dispute
 - If the church wanted to resolve these disputes, we could do it easily enough if we would just attend to the Bible without regard to preference
- You can see this excuse at work behind the recent rise in popularity of the heretical teaching that claims hell doesn't actually exist
 - People feel better rejecting the idea of hell because we prefer to that no one suffer
 - And this view is gaining hold in some corners of the church despite the fact that the Bible says plainly that Hell is real
 - The truth is Hell is operating today and more people enter every hour
 - But if Hell isn't real, then what exactly did Christ die to save us from?

- So excuse #3 is believing only what we prefer, and dismissing contrary evidence even when it's compelling because we don't want to accept hard truth
 - It's an excuse made possible by believers who don't understand the Bible well enough to reason out the truth from scripture or they simply ignore it altogether
 - Therefore, they fall back on personal preference to determine what to believe
 - They may prefer a teaching because it agrees with a favorite pastor, or a spouse or parents' teaching or with their denominational position
 - That's paint the hard truths of the Bible in whitewash so as to obscure what it says and replace truth with palatable lies
 - We have to be good Bible students so we can defend ourselves and each other from this nonsense
- Unfortunately, the false voices speaking flattering lies in contradiction to God's word are getting louder and bolder
 - The two most common lies floating around the church today are the prosperity gospel and the word faith movement
 - The prosperity gospel says that a relationship with Christ is merely a means to receive wealth and success on earth
 - While the word faith teaching says that we can "claim" a preferred outcome in any situation and the Lord promises to bring it to pass so long as we have enough "faith" in that outcome
 - Each of these false teachings have a large community of false prophets and a devoted following of disciples
 - Both of these false teachings tell Christians things they want to hear, that we can have what we want in life
 - And both contradict the clear teaching of scripture
 - Moreover, the majority of voices in the church today – certainly those on TV and the bookstand – echo these false teachings
 - While the voices of truth that proclaim the truth of God's word are getting harder and harder to find

- So it would seem that popularity is on the side of the false teachers
- Therefore, if you should ever confront someone caught up in this nonsense telling them what the Bible actually says, they often won't hear it
 - You show them from scripture that Christ didn't promise to make His followers rich; He taught that we must be prepared to lose everything
 - Or you explain that the Bible says God does not cater to our desires but calls us to take up a cross, sacrificing our desires to follow Him...
- Still, they won't hear it
 - They dismiss your counsel because it doesn't appeal to them
 - And they say you're just one voice, while there are many voices on TBN saying differently
- The believers who have been sucked into these miserable deceptions spread by hypocritical liars are following the same example of the exiles
 - They are giving attention to false words of counsel simply because they prefer that message over what the Bible says
 - They care little or nothing for what the Bible actually says
 - And these false teachers are experts in preying on these desires
 - Once again, the truth in these matters isn't hard to find, so long as we're willing to give our attention to God's word
 - And giving attention means serious, life-long study
 - In days when the enemy is working so effectively to whitewash walls, we must set our minds on becoming even better Bible students