

CHAPTER 13

Mention had been made, in the chapter before, of the vain visions and flattering divinations with which the people of Israel suffered themselves to be imposed upon (v. 24); now this whole chapter is levelled against them. God's faithful prophets are nowhere so sharp upon any sort of sinners as upon the false prophets, not because they were the most spiteful enemies to them, but because they put the highest affront upon God and did the greatest mischief to his people. The prophet here shows the sin and punishment,

I. Of the false prophets (v. 1-16).

II. Of the false prophetesses (v. 17-23). Both agreed to sooth men up in their sins, and, under pretence of comforting God's people, to flatter them with hopes that they should yet have peace; but the prophets shall be proved liars, their prophecies mere shams, and the expectations of the people illusions; for God will let them know that “the deceived and the deceiver are his,” are both accountable to him, ^{<826>}Job 12:16.

^{<331>}EZEKIEL 13:1-9

THE GUILT OF FALSE PROPHETS

The false prophets, who are here prophesied against, were some of them at Jerusalem (^{<234>}Jeremiah 23:14): *I have seen in the prophets at Jerusalem a horrible thing*; some of them among the captives in Babylon, for to them Jeremiah writes (^{<298>}Jeremiah 29:8), *Let not your diviners, that be in the midst of you, deceive you*. And as God's prophets, though at a distance from each other in place or time, yet preached the same truths, which was an evidence that they were guided by one and the same good Spirit, so the false prophets prophesied the same lies, being actuated by one and the same spirit of error. There were little hopes of bringing them to repentance, they were so hardened in their sin; yet Ezekiel must prophesy against them, in hopes that the people might be cautioned not to hearken to them; and thus a testimony will be left upon record against them, and they will thereby be left inexcusable.

Ezekiel had express orders to *prophecy against the prophets of Israel*; so they called themselves, as if none but they had been worthy of the name of Israel's prophets, who were indeed Israel's deceivers. But it is observable that Israel was never imposed upon by pretenders to prophecy till after they had rejected and abused the true prophets; as, afterwards, they were never deluded by counterfeit messiahs till after they had refused the true Messiah and rejected him. These false prophets must be required to *hear the word of the Lord*. They took upon them to speak what concerned others as from God; let them now hear what concerned themselves as from him. And two things the prophet is directed to do: —

I. To discover their sin to them, and to convince them of that if possible, or thereby to prevent their proceeding any further, by making *manifest their folly unto all men*, ² Timothy 3:9. They are here called *foolish prophets* (v. 3), men that did not at all understand the business they pretended to; to make fools of the people they made fools of themselves, and put the greatest cheat upon their own souls. Let us see what is here laid to their charge.

1. They pretend to have a commission from God, whereas he never sent them. They thrust themselves into the prophetic office, without warrant from him who is *the Lord God* of the holy prophets, which was a foolish thing; for how could they expect that God should own them in a work to which he never called them? They are *prophets out of their own hearts* (so the margin reads it, v. 2), prophets of their own making, v. 6. *They say, The Lord saith*; they pretend to be his messengers, but *the Lord has not sent them*, has not given them any orders. They counterfeit the broad seal of heaven, than which they cannot do a greater indignity to mankind, for hereby they put a reproach upon divine revelation, lessen its credit, and weaken its credibility. When these pretenders are found to be deceivers atheists and infidels will thence infer, They are all so. *The Lord has not sent them*; for though crafty enough in other things *like the foxes*, and very wise for the world, yet they are *foolish prophets* and have no experimental acquaintance with the things of God. Note, Foolish prophets are not of God's sending, for whom he sends he either finds fit or makes fit. Where he gives warrant he gives wisdom.

2. They pretend to have instructions from God, whereas he never made himself and his mind known to them: *They followed their own spirit* (v. 3); they delivered that as a message from God which was the product

either of their subtle invention, to serve a turn for themselves, or of their own crazed and heated imagination, to give vent to a fancy. For *they have seen nothing*, they have not really had any heavenly vision; they pretend that what they say *the Lord saith it*, but God disowns it: “*I have not spoken it*, I never said it, never meant any such thing.” What they delivered was not what they had seen or heard, as that is which the ministers of Christ deliver (1 John 1:1), but either what they had dreamed or what they thought would please those they coveted to make an interest in; this is called their *seeing vanity and lying divination* (v. 6); they pretended to have seen that which they did not see, and produced that as a divine truth which they knew to be false. To the same purport (v. 7): *You have seen a vain vision and spoken a lying divination*, which had no divine original and would have no effect, but would certainly be disproved by the event; the words are changed (v. 8): *You have spoken vanity and seen lies*; what they saw and what they said was all alike, a mere sham; they saw nothing, they said nothing, to the purpose, nothing that could be relied on or that deserved regard. Again (v. 9), *They see vanity and divine lies*; they pretended to have had visions, as the true prophets had, whereas really they had none, but either it was the creature of their own fancy (they thought they had a vision, as men in a delirium do, that was *seeing vanity*) or it was a fiction of their own politics, and they knew they had none, and then they *saw lies, and divined lies*. See Jeremiah 23:16, etc. Note, Since the devil is universally known to be the father of lies, those put the highest affront imaginable upon God who tell lies, and then father them upon him. But those that had put God's character upon Satan, in worshipping devils, arrived at length at such a pitch of impiety as to put Satan's character upon God.

3. They took no care to prevent the judgments of God that were breaking in upon the kingdom. They are like *the foxes in the deserts*, running to and fro, and seeming to be in a great hurry, but it was to get away and shift for their own safety, not to do any good: *The hireling flees, and leaves the sheep*. They are like foxes that are greedy of prey for themselves, crafty and cruel to feed themselves. But (v. 5), “*You have not gone up into the gaps, nor made up the hedge of the house of Israel*. A breach is made in their fences, at which judgments are ready to pour in upon them, and then, if ever, is the time to do them service; but you have done nothing to help them.” They should have made intercession for them, to turn away the wrath of God; but they were not praying prophets, had no interest in

heaven nor intercourse with heaven (as prophets used to have, ¹⁹¹⁶Genesis 20:7) and so could do them no service that way. They should have made it their business by preaching and advice to bring people to repentance and reformation, and so have *made up the hedge*, and put a stop to the judgments of God; but this was none of their care: they contrived how to please people, not how to profit them. They saw a deluge of profaneness and impiety breaking in upon the land, waging war with virtue and holiness, and threatening to crush them and bear them down, and then they should have come in *to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty*, by witnessing against the wickedness of the time and place they lived in; but they thought that would be as dangerous a piece of service as standing in a breach to make it good against the besiegers, and therefore they declined it, did nothing to stem the tide, stood not in the battle against vice and immorality, but basely deserted the cause of religion and reformation, *in the day of the Lord*, when it was proclaimed, *Who is on the Lord's side? Who will rise up for me against the evil-doers?* ¹⁹¹⁶Psalms 94:16. Those were unworthy the name of prophets that could think so favourably of sin, and had so little zeal for God and the public welfare.

4. They flattered people into a vain hope that the judgments God had threatened would never come, whereby they hardened those in sin whom they should have endeavoured to turn from sin (v. 6): *They have made others to hope* that all should be well, and they should have peace, though they went on still in their trespasses, and that the event would confirm the word. They were still ready to say, “We will warrant you that these troubles will be at an end quickly, and we shall be in prosperity again.” as if their warrants would confirm false prophecies, in defiance of God himself.

II. He is directed to denounce the judgments of God against them for these sins, from which their pretending to the character of prophets would not exempt them.

1. In general, here is a *woe* against them (v. 3), and what that woe is we are told (v. 8). *Behold, I am against you, saith the Lord God.* Note, Those are in a woeful condition that have God against them. Woe, and a thousand woes, to those that have made him their enemy.

2. In particular, they are sentenced to be excluded from all the privileges of the commonwealth of Israel, for they are adjudged to have forfeited them all (v. 9): God's *hand shall be upon them*, to seize them and bring them to his bar, to shut them out from his presence, and they will find it a *fearful thing to fall into his hands*. They pretend to be prophets, particular favourites of heaven, and authorized to preside in the congregation of his church on earth; but, by pretending to the honours they were not entitled to, they lost those that otherwise they might have enjoyed, ^{<415>}Matthew 5:19. Their doom is,

(1.) To be expelled from the communion of saints, and not to be looked upon as belonging to it: *They shall not be in the secret of my people*; their folly shall be so clearly manifested that they shall never be consulted, nor their advice asked; they shall not be present at any debates about public affairs. Or, rather, they shall not be in the assembly of God's people for religious worship, for they shall be ashamed to show their heads there, when they are proved by the events to be false prophets, and, like Cain, shall *go out from the presence of the Lord*. The people that are deceived by them shall abandon them, and resolve to have no more to do with them. Those that usurped Moses's chair shall not be allowed so much as a door-keeper's place. In the great day they shall *not stand in the congregation of the righteous* (^{<416>}Psalm 1:5), when God *gathers his saints together to him* (^{<417>}Psalm 50:5, 16), *to be for ever with him*.

(2.) To be expunged out of the book of the living. They shall die in their captivity, and shall die childless, shall leave no posterity to take their denomination from them, and so their names shall not be found among those who either themselves or their posterity returned out of Babylon, of whom a particular account was kept in a public register, which was called *the writing of the house of Israel*, such as we have Ezra 2. They shall not be found among the living in Jerusalem, ^{<248>}Isaiah 4:3. Or they shall not be found written among those whom God has from eternity chosen to be vessels of his mercy to eternity. We read of those who *prophesied in Christ's name*, and yet he will tell them that he *never knew them* (^{<412>}Matthew 7:22, 23), because they were not among those that were *given to him*. The Chaldee paraphrase reads it, *They shall not be written in the writing of eternal life, which is written for the righteous of the house of Israel*. See ^{<468>}Psalm 69:28.

(3.) To be for ever excluded from the land of Israel. God has *sworn in his wrath* concerning them that *they shall never enter* with the returning captives into the land of Canaan, which a second time remains a rest for them. Note, Those who oppose the design of God's threatenings, and will not be awed and influenced by them, forfeit the benefit of his promises, and cannot expect to be comforted and encouraged by them.

⌘ EZEKIEL 13:10-16

THE DOOM OF FALSE PROPHETS

We have here more plain dealing with the false prophets, and some further articles of their doom. We have seen the people made ashamed of the false prophets (though sometimes they had been fond of them) and casting them away, as they shall do their false gods, with indignation; now here we find them as much ashamed of their false prophecies, which they had sometimes depended upon with much assurance. Observe,

I. How the people are deceived by the false prophets. Those flatterers seduce them, saying, *Peace, and there was no peace*, v. 10. They pretended to have *seen visions of peace*, v. 16. But that could not be, for *there was no peace, saith the Lord God*. There was no prosperity designed for them, and therefore there could be no ground for their security; yet they told them that God was at peace with them, and had mercy in reserve for them, and that the war they were engaged in with the Chaldeans should soon end in an honourable peace, and their land should enjoy a happy repose and tranquillity. They told the idolaters and other sinners that there was neither harm nor danger in the way they were in. Thus they *seduced God's people*; they put a cheat upon them, led them into mistakes, and drew them aside out of that way of repentance and reformation which the other prophets were endeavouring to bring them into. Note, Those are the most dangerous seducers who suggest to sinners that which tends to lessen their dread of sin and their fear of God. Now this is compared to the building of a slight rotten wall, or, according to our Saviour's similitude, which is to the same purport with this (⌘ Matthew 7:26), the *building of a house upon the sand*, which seems to be a shelter and protection for a while, but will fall when a storm comes. One false prophet built the wall, set up the notion that God was not at all displeased with Jerusalem, but

that the city should be confirmed in its flourishing state, and be victorious over the powers that now threatened it. This notion was very pleasing, and he that started it made himself very acceptable by it and was caressed by every body, which invited others to say the same. They made the matter look yet more plausible and promising; they *daubed the wall*, which the first had built, but it was with *untempered mortar*, sorry stuff, that will not bind nor hold the bricks together; they had no ground for what they said, nor had it any consistency with itself, but was like ropes of sand. They did not strengthen the wall, were in no care to make it firm, to see that they went upon sure grounds; they only daubed it to hide the cracks and make it look well to the eye. And the wall thus built, when it comes to any stress, much more to any distress, will bulge and totter, and come down by degrees. Note, Doctrines that are groundless, though ever so grateful, that are not built upon a scripture foundation nor fastened with a scripture cement, though ever so plausible, ever so pleasing, are not of any worth, nor will stand men in any stead; and those hopes of peace and happiness which are not warranted by the word of God will but cheat men, like a wall that is well daubed indeed, but ill-built.

II. How they will be soon undeceived by the judgment of God, which, we are sure, is according to truth.

1. God will in anger bring a terrible storm that shall beat fiercely and furiously upon the wall. The descent which the Chaldean army shall make upon Judah, and the siege which they shall lay to Jerusalem, will be as *an overflowing shower*, or inundation (such as Solomon calls a *sweeping rain that leaves no food*, ^{<10B>}Proverbs 28:3), will bear down all before it, as the deluge did in Noah's time: *You, O great hailstones! shall fall*, the artillery of heaven, every hailstone like a cannon-ball, battering this wall, and with these a *stormy wind*, which is sometimes so strong as to *rend the rocks* (^{<10B>}1 Kings 19:11), much more an ill-built wall, v. 11. But that which makes this *rain*, and *hail*, and *wind*, most terrible is that they arise from the wrath of God, and are enforced by that; it is that which sends them; it is that which gives them the setting on (v. 13); it is *a stormy wind in my fury*, and *an overflowing shower in my anger*, and *great hailstones in my fury*. The fury of Nebuchadnezzar and his princes, who highly resented Zedekiah's treachery, made the invasion very formidable, but that was nothing in comparison with God's displeasure. *The staff in their hand is my indignation*, ^{<10B>}Isaiah 10:5. Note, An angry God has winds and storms at command wherewith to alarm secure sinners; and his wrath makes them

frightful and forcible indeed; for *who can stand before him when he is angry?*

2. This storm shall overturn the wall: *it shall fall*, and the wind shall *rend it* (v. 11), the *hailstones shall consume it* (v. 13); I will *break it down* (v. 14) and *bring it to the ground*, so that the *foundation thereof shall be discovered*; it will appear how false, how rotten it was, to the prophetic reproach of the builders. When the Chaldean army has made Judah and Jerusalem desolate then this credit of the prophets, and the hopes of the people, will both sink together; the former will be found false in flattering the people and the latter foolish in suffering themselves to be imposed upon by them, and so exposed to so much the greater confusion, when the judgment shall surprise them in their security. Note, Whatever men think to shelter themselves with against the judgments of God, while they continue unreformed, will prove but a *refuge of lies* and will not profit them *in the day of wrath*. See ^{}Isaiah 28:17. Men's anger cannot shake that which God has built (for *the blast of the terrible ones is but as a storm against the wall*, which makes a great noise, but never stirs the wall; see ^{}Isaiah 25:4), but God's anger will overthrow that which men have built in opposition to him. They and all their attempts, they and all the securities wherein they intrench themselves, shall be *as a bowing wall and as a tottering fence* (^{}Psalm 62:3, 10); and when their vain predictions are disproved, and their vain expectations disappointed, then it will be discovered that there was no ground for either, ^{}Habakkuk 3:13. The *day will declare* what every man's work is, and *the fire will try it*, ^{}1 Corinthians 3:13.

3. The builders of the wall, and those that daubed it, will themselves be buried in the ruins of it: *It shall fall, and you shall be consumed in the midst thereof*, v. 14. And thus the threatenings of God's wrath, and all the just intentions of it, shall be accomplished to the uttermost, both upon *the wall* and upon those *that have daubed it*, v. 15. The same judgments that will prove the false prophets to be false will punish them for their falsehood; and they themselves shall be involved in the calamity which they made the people believe there was no danger of, and become monuments of that justice which they bade defiance to. Thus, *if the blind lead the blind*, both the blind leaders and the blind followers will *fall together into the ditch*. Note, Those that deceive others will in the end prove to have deceived themselves; and no doom will be more fearful than that of unfaithful ministers, that flattered sinners in their sins.

4. Both the deceivers and the deceived, when they thus perish together, will justly be ridiculed and triumphed over (v. 12): *When the wall has fallen shall it not be said unto you*, by those that gave credit to the true prophets, and feared the word of the Lord, “Now *where is the daubing wherewith you have daubed the wall?* What has become of all the fine soft words and fair promises wherewith you flattered your wicked neighbours, and all the assurances you gave them that the troubles of the nation should soon be at an end?” The *righteous shall laugh at them*, the righteous God shall, righteous men shall, saying, *Lo, this is the man that made not God his strength*, ^{<1516>}Psalm 52:6, 7. *I also will laugh at your calamity*, ^{<1115>}Proverbs 1:26. They will say unto you (v. 15), “*The wall is no more, neither he that daubed it; your hopes have vanished, and those that supported them, even the prophets of Israel,*” v. 16. Note, Those that usurp the honours that do not belong to them will shortly be filled with the shame that does.

^{<1517>}EZEKIEL 13:17-23

THE GUILT OF THE FALSE PROPHETESSES

As God has promised that when he pours out his Spirit upon his people both *their sons and their daughters shall prophesy*, so the devil, when he acts as a spirit of lies and falsehood, is so in the mouth not only of false prophets, but of false prophetesses too, and those are the deceivers whom the prophet is here directed to prophesy against; for they are not such despicable enemies to God's truths as deserve not to be taken notice of, nor yet will either the weakness of their sex excuse their sin or the tenderness and respect that are owing to it exempt them from the reproaches and threatenings of the word of God. No: *Son of man, set thy face against the daughters of thy people*, v. 17. God takes no pleasure in owning them for his people. They are *thy people*, as ^{<1231E>}Exodus 32:7. The women pretend to a spirit of prophecy, and are in the same song with the men, as Ahab's prophets were: *Go on, and prosper*. They *prophesy out of their own heart* too; they say what comes uppermost and what they know nothing of. Therefore *prophesy against them* from God's own mouth. The prophet must *set his face against them*, and try if they can look him in the face and stand to what they say. Note, When sinners grow very impudent it is time for reprovers to be very bold. Now observe,

I. How the sin of these false prophetesses is described, and what are the particulars of it.

1. They told deliberate lies to those who consulted them, and came to them to be advised, and to be told their fortune: “You do mischief *by your lying to my people that hear your lies* (v. 19); they come to be told the truth, but you tell them lies; and, because you humour them in their sins, they are willing to hear you.” Note, It is ill with those people who can better hear pleasing lies than displeasing truths; and it is a temptation to those who lie in wait to deceive to tell lies when they find people willing to hear them and to excuse themselves with this, *Si populus vult decipi, decipiatur — If the people will be deceived, let them.*

2. They profaned the name of God by pretending to have received those lies from him (v. 19): “*You pollute my name among my people, and make use of that for the patronising of your lies and the gaining of credit to them.*” Note, Those greatly pollute God's holy name that make use of it to give countenance to falsehood and wickedness. Yet this they did *for handfuls of barley and pieces of bread.* They did it for gain; they cared not what dishonour they did to God's name by their lying, so they could but make a hand of it for themselves. There is nothing so sacred which men of mercenary spirits, in whom the love of this world reigns, will not profane and prostitute, if they can but get money by the bargain. But they did it for poor gain; if they could get no more for it, rather than break they would sell you a false prophecy that should please you to a nicety for the beggar's dole, a *piece of bread* or a *handful of barley*; and yet that was more than it was worth. Had they asked it as an alms, for God's sake, surely they might have had it, and God would have been honoured; but, taking it as a fee for a false prophecy, God's name is polluted, and the smallness of the reward heightens the offence. *For a piece of bread that man will transgress,* ²⁰⁸⁹Proverbs 28:21. Had their poverty been their temptation to *steal, and so to take the name of the Lord in vain*, it would not have been nearly so bad as when it tempted them to *prophecy lies in his name* and so to profane it.

3. They kept people in awe, and terrified them with their pretensions: “*You hunt the souls of my people* (v. 18), *hunt them to make them flee* (v. 20), *hunt them into gardens* (so the margin reads it); you use all the arts you have to court or compel them into those places where you deliver your pretended predictions, or you have got such an influence upon them that you make them do just as you would have them to do, and tyrannise over

them.” It was indeed the people's fault that they did regard them, but it was their fault by lies and falsehoods to command that regard; they pretended to *save the souls alive that came to them*, v. 18. If they would but be hearers of them, and contributors to them, they might be sure of salvation; thus they beguiled unstable souls that had a concern about salvation as their end but did not rightly understand the way, and therefore hearkened to those who were most confident in promising it to them. “But will you pretend to save souls, or secure salvation to your party?” Those are justly suspected that make such pretensions.

4. They discouraged those that were honest and good, and encouraged those that were wicked and profane: *You slay the souls that should not die, and save those alive that should not live*, v. 19. This is explained (v. 22): *You have made the heart of the righteous sad, whom I have not made sad*; because they would not, they durst not, countenance your pretensions, you thundered out the judgments of God against them, to their great grief and trouble; you put them under invidious characters, to make them either despicable or odious to the people, and pretended to do it in God's name, which made them go many a time with a sad heart; whereas it was the will of God that they should be comforted, and by having respect put upon them should have encouragement given them. But on the other side, and which is still worse, you have *strengthened the hands of the wicked* and emboldened them to go on in their *wicked ways* and not to return from them, which was the thing the true prophets with earnestness called them to. “You have promised sinners life in their sinful ways, have told them that they shall have peace though they go on, by which their *hands have been strengthened* and their hearts hardened.” Some think this refers to the severe censures they passed upon those who had already gone into captivity (who were humbled under their affliction, by *which their hearts were made sad*), and the commendations they gave to those who rebelled against the king of Babylon, who were hardened in their impieties, by which their *hands were strengthened*; or by their polluting the name of God they saddened the hearts of good people who have a value and veneration for the word of God, and confirmed atheists and infidels in their contempt of divine revelation and furnished them with arguments against it. Note, Those have a great deal to answer for who grieve the spirits, and weaken the hands, of good people, and who gratify the lusts of sinners, and animate them in their opposition to God and religion. Nor can any thing strengthen the hands of sinners more than to tell them that they

may be saved in their sins without repentance, or that there may be repentance though they do not return from their wicked ways.

5. They mimicked the true prophets, by giving signs for the illustrating of their false predictions (as Hananiah did, ~~2880~~ Jeremiah 28:10), and they were signs agreeable to their sex; they *sewed little pillows to the people's arm-holes*, to signify that they might be easy and repose themselves, and needed not be disquieted with the apprehensions of trouble approaching. And they *made kerchiefs upon the head of every stature*, of persons of every age, young and old, distinguishable by their stature, v. 18. These kerchiefs were badges of liberty or triumph, intimating that they should not only be delivered from the Chaldeans, but be victorious over them. Some think these were some superstitious rites which they used with those to whom they delivered their divinations, preparing them for the reception of them by putting enchanted pillows under their arms and handkerchiefs on their heads, to raise their fancies and their expectations of something great. Or perhaps the expressions are figurative: they did all they could to make people secure, which is signified by laying them easy, and to make people proud, which is signified by dressing them fine with handkerchiefs, perhaps laid or embroidered on their heads.

II. How the wrath of God against them is expressed. Here is a woe to them (v. 18), and God declares himself against the methods they took to delude and deceive, v. 20. But what course will God take with them?

1. They shall be confounded in their attempts, and shall proceed no further; for (v. 23) you shall *see no more vanity nor divine revelations*; not that they shall themselves lay down their pretensions in a way of repentance, but when the event gives them the lie they shall be silent for shame; or their fancies and imaginations shall not be disposed to receive impressions which assist them in their divinations as they have been; or they themselves shall be cut off.

2. God's people shall be delivered out of their hands. When they see themselves deluded by them into a false peace and a fool's paradise, and that though they would not leave their sin their sin has left them, and they *see no more vanity nor divine divinations*, they shall turn their back upon them, shall slight their predictions. The righteous shall be no more saddened by them, no, nor the wicked strengthened: *The pillows shall be torn from their arms, and the kerchiefs from their heads*; the fallacies shall

be discovered, their frauds detected, and the people of God shall no more be in their hand, to be hunted as they had been. Note, It is a great mercy to be delivered from a servile regard to, and fear of, those who, under colour of a divine authority, impose upon and tyrannise over the consciences of men, and say to their souls, *Bow down, that we may go over.* But it is a sore grief to those who delight in such usurpations to have their power broken and the prey delivered; such was the reformation to the church of Rome. And, when God does this, he makes it to appear that he is the Lord, that it is his prerogative to give law to souls.