

“Chapters 12 -19 may be classified as a distinct division of the prophecy. . . the theme is still one of judgment for the nation’s continued disobedience. . . Ezekiel’s main purpose was to reveal how baseless the people’s confidence was that the kingdom and the capital would be spared, and to arouse the remnant to repentance” (Feinberg, Ezekiel, 68).

## **Ezekiel 12**

***12:1 The word of the LORD came to me:***

***12:2 "Son of man, you dwell in the midst of a rebellious house, who have eyes to see, but see not, who have ears to hear, but hear not, for they are a rebellious house.***

***12:3 As for you, son of man, prepare for yourself an exile's baggage, and go into exile by day in their sight. You shall go like an exile from your place to another place in their sight. Perhaps they will understand, though they are a rebellious house.***

***12:4 You shall bring out your baggage by day in their sight, as baggage for exile, and you shall go out yourself at evening in their sight, as those do who must go into exile.***

***12:5 In their sight dig through the wall, and bring your baggage out through it.***

***12:6 In their sight you shall lift the baggage upon your shoulder and carry it out at dusk. You shall cover your face that you may not see the land, for I have made you a sign for the house of Israel."***

***12:7 And I did as I was commanded. I brought out my baggage by day, as baggage for exile, and in the evening I dug through the wall with my own hands. I brought out my baggage at dusk, carrying it on my shoulder in their sight.***

Ezekiel 12 is fairly easy to understand. Ezekiel is writing to those in exile who were as hardened as those who remained in Jerusalem (12:2).

The people had adjusted God’s word to suit their desires rather than allow the word of God to shape their lives. Such behavior is foolishness; God’s words will come to pass regardless of our imaginations. Thus, God instructs Ezekiel to perform a symbol-laden action; he is to reenact the exiles’ experience, forcing them to remember that God carries out His purposes no matter how badly they wished for something else. Jerusalem would be judged in spite of the fact that many in exile still believed that restoration to their homeland would be realized.

One can only imagine how powerful Ezekiel’s actions were. “In full view of the exiles, he packs his meager belongings in exactly the same way he would if he were a Jerusalemite preparing for a seven-hundred-mile march into exile. What he could bring would have to be carried on his shoulders” (Carson, For the Love of God, Vol 1, Sept. 24 meditation). Next, he dug through the mud-brick walls of his own house at night picturing the desperation of escape. He then covered his face so that he would not see land, that is, he concealed himself to avoid recognition. Although the people asked him what he was doing (12:9), Ezekiel said nothing.

Verses 8-16 explain Ezekiel’s actions:

**12:8 In the morning the word of the LORD came to me:**

**12:9 "Son of man, has not the house of Israel, the rebellious house, said to you, 'What are you doing?'**

**12:10 Say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: This oracle concerns the prince in Jerusalem and all the house of Israel who are in it.'**

**12:11 Say, 'I am a sign for you: as I have done, so shall it be done to them. They shall go into exile, into captivity.'**

The next morning Ezekiel is reminded that the people were asking about the meaning behind Ezekiel's actions ("What are you doing?" 12:2). Ezekiel answers their question in verses 10 and 11: "This oracle concerns the prince in Jerusalem and all the house of Israel who are in it. I am a sign for you: as I have done, so shall it be done to them. They shall go into exile, into captivity." This is fleshed out in 12:12-16.

**12:12 And the prince who is among them shall lift his baggage upon his shoulder at dusk, and shall go out. They shall dig through the wall to bring him out through it. He shall cover his face, that he may not see the land with his eyes.**

**12:13 And I will spread my net over him, and he shall be taken in my snare. And I will bring him to Babylon, the land of the Chaldeans, yet he shall not see it, and he shall die there.**

**12:14 And I will scatter toward every wind all who are around him, his helpers and all his troops, and I will unsheathe the sword after them.**

**12:15 And they shall know that I am the LORD, when I disperse them among the nations and scatter them among the countries.**

**12:16 But I will let a few of them escape from the sword, from famine and pestilence, that they may declare all their abominations among the nations where they go, and may know that I am the LORD."**

The oracle concerns Zedekiah who was appointed by Babylon as a vassal ruler over Judah (12:10). Though he was called a king, Ezekiel refused to address a Babylonian appointee with the title reserved for the legitimate king (King Jehoiachin - Ezekiel 1:2) who was alive in exile.

Ezekiel predicts that Zedekiah would try to escape from Jerusalem under the cover of darkness when the city is under siege, but would be captured and led away into exile. Of course, if this was to be the fate of the ruler of Judah, the same fate would befall the citizens as well (12:10).

The fulfillment of the event is written in 2 Kings 25:1-7. The fulfillment was so precise that liberal scholars (who deny the sovereignty and foreknowledge of God) insist that it had to have been added to the book after the fact. The truth is God knows the future and brings it to pass (note verses 13-15 where the actor is God Himself – "I will. . .").

The key to the event are the words, "he may not see the land"; neither Zedekiah nor the people would ever return to see their native soil.

The goal of the judgment is in verses 15 and 16: “they shall know that I am the LORD.”

Although Ezekiel is a true prophet of God, his words were not left unchallenged by others who also claimed to speak for God. Chapters 12:21-14:11 reflect Ezekiel’s conflicts with others who professed to be prophets. The section divides into three subunits: (1) the people’s cynicism toward the prophets (12:21-28), (2) the abuse of people who claimed to be prophets of God (13:1-23), and (3) the fate of the false prophets and those who follow them (14:9-11).

### **THE PEOPLE’S CYNICISM TOWARD THE PROPHETS (12:21-28)**

**12:21** *And the word of the LORD came to me:*

**12:22** *"Son of man, what is this proverb that you have about the land of Israel, saying, 'The days grow long, and every vision comes to nothing'?"*

Spiritual coldness is often expressed in cynicism toward Yahweh and His spokesman. In every age people have questioned the effectiveness of the word of God.

In verse 22 God asks Ezekiel about the proverb that was circulating among the people: “The days grow long, and every vision comes to nothing.” The proverb reflected the cynicism of the people who were tired of the prophets and their doomsday messages. For decades they had heard from the prophet Jeremiah that God’s judgment would fall, but nothing had happened; Jerusalem and its mighty walls remained intact. The people had become apathetic.

“Peter applies the same point to Christians, drawing from another Old Testament account. After the warnings began, the Flood was decades coming, and no one was ready for it except Noah and his family. So it is not surprising that in the “last days”—the days between the first and second comings of Christ, the days in which we live—new generations of scoffers arise and make a virtue of the same wretched cynicism: “Where is this ‘coming’ he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation” (2 Pet. 3:3-4). But the Flood came. And so will the fire” (Carson, *For the Love of God*, vol 1, Sept. 24 meditation).

Their outlook presumed upon the goodness and grace of God. “Doubtless God sees the long delay as powerful evidence of his forbearance and mercy, providing multiplied opportunities for repentance; the people simply grow cynical” (Carson, *For the Love of God*, vol 1, Sept. 24 meditation). Instead of taking advantage of the opportunity and repenting, they strayed further, “living in the fantasy of security when judgment was imminent” (Alexander, 790).

The Lord will have the last word. God's method of reckoning time is different from ours; we may be much nearer the Day of Judgment than we realize. The challenges of arrogant rebellious people will not change the fact that when God speaks, He acts. Within a few years of this utterance, the cynics would be silenced by the terrible truth of his word.

God responds in verse 23.

**12:23** *Tell them therefore, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: I will put an end to this proverb, and they shall no more use it as a proverb in Israel.' But say to them, The days are near, and the fulfillment of every vision.*

**12:24** *For there shall be no more any false vision or flattering divination within the house of Israel.*

**12:25** *For I am the LORD; I will speak the word that I will speak, and it will be performed. It will no longer be delayed, but in your days, O rebellious house, I will speak the word and perform it, declares the Lord GOD."*

God will put an end to their waiting, judgment will fall, and their cynicism will end (12:23). To the degree that the false prophets were engaged in the "art" of determining God's will and declaring it, they could be considered "diviners." God says that false visions and "flattering divination" would end. "What God had said, He will do. It is tragic that mankind often learns this truth only through the experience of judgment and discipline" (Alexander, 790).

**12:26** *And the word of the LORD came to me:*

**12:27** *"Son of man, behold, they of the house of Israel say, 'The vision that he sees is for many days from now, and he prophesies of times far off.'*

**12:28** *Therefore say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: None of my words will be delayed any longer, but the word that I speak will be performed, declares the Lord GOD."*

Verses 26-28 speak of the attitude of the people in exile. While the people in Jerusalem were saying that the prophet's words were empty threats, the exiles saw the threats as of no consequence to them. Even if they believed Ezekiel, they had concluded, "The vision that he sees is for many days from now, and he prophesies of times far off." In other words, they thought that Ezekiel was predicting things so far in the future that the generation he is speaking to would never see these things come to pass.

## **Ezekiel 13**

### **THE ABUSE OF PEOPLE WHO CLAIMED TO BE PROPHETS OF GOD (13:1-23)**

**13:1** *Then the word of the LORD came to me saying,*

**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!*

**13:3** *'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Woe to the foolish prophets who are following their own spirit and have seen nothing.*

**13:4** *"O Israel, your prophets have been like foxes among ruins.*

**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.*

**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.**

**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?""**

**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.**

**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.**

Ezekiel had already pronounced judgment on the city of Jerusalem, the prince, and the people; he now focuses his attention on the false prophets. The first distinction that he makes between the true and false prophet is the source of their prophetic utterances. What is spoken by the genuine prophet comes from God; the false prophets speak from their own imagination (13:2). "This is not so much a principle that the onlooker can use, as a warning to the false prophets themselves. False prophets may deceive other people; they never deceive God. And it is to God that we will one day have to give an account (Ezek. 13:8-9)" (Carson, For the Love of God, vol. 1, Sept. 25 meditation).

False prophets are called foolish (13:3), a term that means more than stupid; it is a word found in relation to atheism (Ps 14:1), blasphemy (Ps 74:22), gross immaturity (2 Sam. 13:12), and arrogance (Prov. 30:32). These false prophets act independently of God altogether (i.e. they follow their own spirit) and lack divine insight (13:3).

Furthermore, their motives are self-seeking. They are compared to foxes (jackals) among the ruins (13:4); they exploit the situation for their own advantage. Though the people need moral and spiritual revitalization and "repair", the false prophets have not gone up into the breaches, nor did they build the wall around the house of Israel to stand in the battle on the day of the LORD. In non-metaphorical language, they made no attempt to fix the spiritual and moral decline when it was in need of repair. Rather, they saw the peoples' degradation as an opportunity to scavenge for themselves.

These prophets face the judgment of God (13:8-9). God's spokesman is accountable not to say more than what God says or to say anything other than what He says (cf. 2:7; 3:10-11); the false prophet will be utterly cut off from the house of Israel and the blessings that God had intended for her (13:9).

**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;**

**13:11 so tell those who plaster it over with whitewash, that it will fall. A flooding rain will come, and you, O hailstones, will fall; and a violent wind will break out.**

**13:12 "Behold, when the wall has fallen, will you not be asked, 'Where is the plaster with which you plastered it?'"**

**13:13 Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD, "I will make a violent wind break out in My wrath. There will also be in My anger a flooding rain and hailstones to consume it in wrath.**

**13:14 "So I will tear down the wall which you plastered over with whitewash and bring it down to the ground, so that its foundation is laid bare; and when it falls, you will be consumed in its midst. And you will know that I am the LORD.**

**13:15 "Thus I will spend My wrath on the wall and on those who have plastered it over with whitewash; and I will say to you, 'The wall is gone and its plasterers are gone,**

**13:16 along with the prophets of Israel who prophesy to Jerusalem, and who see visions of peace for her when there is no peace,' declares the Lord GOD.**

Not only does the false prophet speak from his own imagination, he patches over spiritual decay and is satisfied with short term results (13:10-16).

False prophets do not deal with the fundamental issues of sin, corruption, injustice, and covenantal faithlessness. They pretend all is well and put the country at ease (13:10), but their promises of peace also put the people into spiritual complacency. “. . . instead of repairing the ‘wall’ they merely cover it with whitewash, so that it looks sturdy enough to the casual observer even though it is hopelessly compromised” (Carson, For the Love of God, vol. 1, Sept. 25 meditation). When God sends destruction (pictured as pounding hail, torrential rain, and hurricane force winds – 13:11, 13), the unsoundness of the wall will become apparent (13:12); it will not stand (13:13, 14). The superficial repair work will not compensate for the structural damage of the wall.

True prophets realize how important it is to hear the word of God, and build into people’s lives for the long haul; they aren’t satisfied with the quick fix, or simply telling the people what they want to hear according to the cultural tides. Instead, they focus on the structural soundness of the people’s lives.

Block provides us with some great applications for Chapter 13 up to this point:

Throughout history God's people have been plagued by charlatans of many sorts. Ezekiel 13:1-16 serves as a warning to all who would claim to be spokespersons for the living God by identifying the marks of a counterfeit.

First, counterfeits characteristically claim divine authority, even when they speak only from their own inspiration. The frauds of Ezekiel's day claimed to have had visions, but had seen nothing. Their perspective toward, their analysis of, and their solutions for the crisis facing the nation or simply private opinion were politically motivated to gain the approval of the audience. Expert training, oratorical gifts, a charismatic personality, and a wealth of experience may qualify one to stand behind a university lectern or political podium, or to perform on the theatrical stage, but these aptitudes alone do not authorize one to stand behind the pulpit. The message of those who claim to speak for God must have his signature. This will be true of our proclamation only to the extent that we declare the message of God revealed in the Scriptures: sola scriptura!

Second, counterfeits characteristically proclaim messages that people want to hear, especially when the truth is painful. For the exiles and the Jerusalemites, no word would have been more welcome but at the same time more deadly than to hear that all was well. Neither the community nor individuals in moral and spiritual decline are served by reassurances of well-being. For many the illusion becomes the reality, and they live in the never-never land of "All is well" even when nothing is. Such an audience will applaud a messenger for the palatability of his or her utterance, not for its truthfulness.

Third, counterfeits characteristically are more interested in their own status than in the welfare of the community. Ezekiel compares false prophets with jackals, scavenging among the ruins for personal advantage, capitalizing on the calamity of others. Frauds assume no responsibility for the fate of the people; they look out for themselves.

Fourth, the utterances of counterfeits characteristically die with them. Being deficient in authority and integrity, their words also lack defective power. The rapidity with which humanly devised panaceas for the ills of society succeed one another in our day is an embarrassing witness to their impotence. Only the word of the Lord endures (Isa. 40:7-8) and achieves its life-giving objectives (Isa. 55:10-11).

Fifth, counterfeits characteristically stand under the judgment of God. For one who is self-inspired to claim to speak for God is the height of arrogance, and to seduce gullible people with flattering words is utter folly.

But God is not mocked. What leaders in particular sow, that they reap

(Block, NICOT, Ezekiel, vol. 1, 409-410).

***13:17 "Now you, son of man, set your face against the daughters of your people who are prophesying from their own inspiration. Prophecy against them***

***13:18 and say, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Woe to the women who sew magic bands on all wrists and make veils for the heads of persons of every stature to hunt down lives! Will you hunt down the lives of My people, but preserve the lives of others for yourselves?"***

***13:19 "For handfuls of barley and fragments of bread, you have profaned Me to My people to put to death some who should not die and to keep others alive who should not live, by your lying to My people who listen to lies."'"***

In addition, what is spoken by the genuine prophet is stamped by integrity and freedom from superstition, while false prophets are mercenary and superstitious; they are more interested in predictions and telling people's fortunes than in conveying the word of the Lord (Ezek. 13:17-19).

In this case, the false prophets are women. There is no clear understanding of what the bands for people's wrists and the veils meant. Block thinks that the Hebrew term translated as "veil" is more likely

speaking of a band that went around the head or neck (perhaps with an amulet upon it). It appears that those who wore these things attached some sort of superstitious belief to them (13:18); they believed they were magic (13:20).

The prophetesses' aggressiveness is pictured as a hunter tracking and killing its game (13:18). With their devious lies they captivate a gullible public. They profane the name of God for pennies (a handful of barley or fragments of bread – 13:19). But their ways will not last. God will invade the lives of these prophetesses and will deliver their victims as one releases a bird from a net (13:20-23).

***13:20 Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I am against your magic bands by which you hunt lives there as birds and I will tear them from your arms; and I will let them go, even those lives whom you hunt as birds.***

***13:21 "I will also tear off your veils and deliver My people from your hands, and they will no longer be in your hands to be hunted; and you will know that I am the LORD.***

***13:22 "Because you disheartened the righteous with falsehood when I did not cause him grief, but have encouraged the wicked not to turn from his wicked way and preserve his life,***

***13:23 therefore, you women will no longer see false visions or practice divination, and I will deliver My people out of your hand. Thus you will know that I am the LORD."***

Once again, we can depend on Block for some astute observations (Block, NICOT, Ezekiel, vol. 1, 418-419):

First, the people of God are most vulnerable to occult influences in times of crisis. Unless one is vigilant in his or her walk with God, difficult experiences may leave one doubting God's presence and power, and open to the sinister powers of darkness. The demonic spiritual world operates in direct opposition to the kingdom of God, seeking to gain control over the weak and to destroy the righteous. In the NT Peter personalizes the power behind the evil, describing him as an adversary, the devil, prowling around like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour (1 Pet. 5:8). But the believer may take heart, knowing that God has provided all the resources needed to resist the malevolent world (Eph. 6:11-12), and that ultimately the kingdom of light and life will triumph over the kingdom of darkness and death (Jude 24-25).

Second, the charm of magic is a trap used by the prince of darkness to seduce unsuspecting victims. From the beginning of history, humans have been enchanted by the spirit world. Magic and witchcraft continue to play a powerful role in many corners of the globe, even in the fundamentally materialistic Western world, which has for so long denied the supernatural. The influence of the occult in the "enlightened" societies, especially among those who have been disillusioned by the prevailing worldview and its failure to answer life's fundamental questions, attests to the seductive power of the kingdom of darkness. Magic offers power. It promises control over one's destiny and over one's enemies. But the message of Ezekiel is that magic is deceiving; it is a trap that binds rather than frees. The exilic prophet also announces that deliverance from the sinister powers of darkness is available, but only in the Lord.



Third, the people of God must resist the temptation to exploit spiritual connections for personal advantage. Such exploitation is obvious when a person resorts to spells, charms, and wizardry, all of which have been condemned by God (Deut. 18:10-14). It is more subtle in other human efforts to harness divine power for selfish ends. The approach to faith that would treat God primarily as the key to health, happiness, and success may be as sorceress and profaning to his name as overtly occult activity. According to the paradigm established by our Lord (Matt. 6:9-13), the antidote to this form of idolatry is a passion for the honor of the Lord's name.

Fourth, those who occupy positions of power will answer to God for the manner in which they have exercised their authority. The pattern of leadership exercised by the women in this text was reprehensible in two respects: their motives were parasitic, and their methods were sinister. On the one hand, they were interested only in their own status; on the other, they marshaled the forces of darkness in support of that power. Both problems continue to plague the community of faith. Men and women enter the ministry of the church, driven more by hunger for power than passion for the people, and they exercise power in ways often indistinguishable from the world outside. But the kingdom of God is offered to the meek, not to the arrogant and self-assertive. Whoever would be a leader at all must be a servant of all.

Carson adds that the danger of setting up idols in our hearts is no less treacherous today than in Ezekiel's time. "Somehow we manage to adhere to our creedal profession, but if anything goes wrong our undisciplined rage shows that we maintain little real trust in the living God: our secret idol is comfort and physical well-being. We attend church, but rarely do we pray in private or thoughtfully read the Word of God. We sing lustily at missionary conventions, but have not shared the Gospel with anyone for years. And deep down we are more interested in our reputation, or in sex, or in holidays, than we are in basking in the awesome radiance and majesty of God. Meditate on Ezekiel 14:8, and ask for forgiveness and grace to become more consistent" (Carson, *For the Love of God*, vol. 1, Sept. 26 meditation).

## **Ezekiel 14**

### **THE FATE OF THE FALSE PROPHETS AND THOSE WHO FOLLOW THEM (14:9-11)**

***14:1 Then some elders of Israel came to me and sat down before me.***

***14:2 And the word of the LORD came to me, saying,***

***14:3 "Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their hearts and have put right before their faces the stumbling block of their iniquity. Should I be consulted by them at all?"***

14:1 introduces a new scene. In 8:1 the elders of Judah were sitting with Ezekiel, now some of them come to him again demanding a message from Yahweh. Yet "these men have set up their idols in their hearts and have put right before their faces the stumbling block of their iniquity" (14:2). So God asks, "Should I let them inquire of me at all?" (NIV – 14:3b). God's first answer is in verse 4 and 5.

**14:4 Therefore speak to them and tell them, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: When any Israelite sets up idols in his heart and puts a wicked stumbling block before his face and then goes to a prophet, I the LORD will answer him myself in keeping with his great idolatry (NIV).**

**14:5 I will do this to recapture the hearts of the people of Israel, who have all deserted me for their idols.'(NIV)**

One would have expected that Yahweh would have given no response to people who have set up idols in their hearts (14:3), but instead He responds (14:4). However, His response is not what the inquirers wished to hear. God addresses their idolatry (14:4). Any man with an idolatrous heart must give an answer to God – that is God's first answer to their inquiry.

A second answer from Yahweh is found in verses 6-11. The answer is surprising and highlights Israel's responsibility for her own fate. It also shows the irrevocability of God's decision to judge.

**14:6 "Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord GOD: Repent and turn away from your idols, and turn away your faces from all your abominations.**

**14:7 For any one of the house of Israel, or of the strangers who sojourn in Israel, who separates himself from me, taking his idols into his heart and putting the stumbling block of his iniquity before his face, and yet comes to a prophet to consult me through him, I the LORD will answer him myself.**

**14:8 And I will set my face against that man; I will make him a sign and a byword and cut him off from the midst of my people, and you shall know that I am the LORD.**

**14:9 And if the prophet is deceived and speaks a word, I, the LORD, have deceived that prophet, and I will stretch out my hand against him and will destroy him from the midst of my people Israel.**

**14:10 And they shall bear their punishment- the punishment of the prophet and the punishment of the inquirer shall be alike-**

**14:11 that the house of Israel may no more go astray from me, nor defile themselves anymore with all their transgressions, but that they may be my people and I may be their God, declares the Lord GOD."(ESV)**

To those who have set up idols in their hearts and put a stumbling block before their face (14:3), God will:

1) set His face against them (14:8)

2) make them a sign and a byword (14:8), that is, their destruction will become evidence of God's disposition toward idolaters; they will be used by others as examples of what happens to those who disobey God.

3) cut them off from the people of Israel (14:8)

In verse 9 Ezekiel switches back to those who abuse their prophetic office. The verse states that the deceptions of the false prophets have come about because God has deceived the prophet.

In order to really understand this verse, one needs to remember that this verse is not the total revelation about God's relationship to evil. It is important to see what is and what is not being said.

1) First, this is not a case of God telling the truth to some and deceiving others who want to know God's will. Rather, God is speaking to the people who want false gods, love lies, and refuse the truth. This is a case where God gives them what they want. If they love deception, God gives it to them. In other words, God's "deception" of the prophets is part of His judicial sentence.

There are some key passages that help us understand the "deception" of God.

I Kings 22 is a classic case study of divine deception. Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, went to Ahab, the king of Israel (I Ki. 22:2), and formed an alliance to fight at Ramoth-gilead. But before they went to battle they decided that they should inquire from God to see if they would win. So the king of Israel gathered about 400 prophets and asked if they should go to battle against Ramoth-gilead, or refrain from battle. The prophets said, "Go up, for the Lord will give it into the hand of the king." But Jehoshaphat asked if there was not another prophet of the LORD of whom they could ask. The king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, "There is yet one man by whom we may inquire of the LORD, Micaiah the son of Imlah, but I hate him, for he never prophesies good concerning me, but evil" (1 Kings 22:6-8). Nevertheless, they sent for Micaiah and inquired of him. As predicted, Micaiah's prophecy was not in favor of the king's desire to go to battle. He said,

20 and the LORD said, 'Who will entice Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead?' And one said one thing, and another said another.

21 Then a spirit came forward and stood before the LORD, saying, 'I will entice him.'

22 And the LORD said to him, 'By what means?' And he said, 'I will go out, and will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.' And he said, 'You are to entice him, and you shall succeed; go out and do so.'

23 Now therefore behold, the LORD has put a lying spirit in the mouth of all your prophets; the LORD has declared disaster for you."

Then Zedekiah, the son of Chenaanah (a false prophet – not the Zedekiah in Ezekiel), struck Micaiah on the cheek and said, "How did the Spirit of the LORD go from me to speak to you?" And the king of Israel commanded that they seize Micaiah, put him in prison and feed him meager rations of bread and water until he returned from battle. Micaiah said, "If you return in peace, the LORD has not spoken by me" (1 Ki. 22:24-28). So they went to battle, the armies of Israel were defeated and the king killed.

The common denominator between the story in I Kings and Ezekiel is that "Yahweh answers insincerity with insincerity. Unrepentant kings and unrepentant people who seek confirmation of their perverse ways, and who clamor for reassurances of well-being do not deserve a straight answer. A false message of peace in critical circumstances not only challenges the hearers to test the prophetic spirit, but also sets up everyone, prophet and layperson alike, who proclaim to the people exactly what they want to hear, Yahweh ensures the people's judgment" (Block, 435).

2 Thessalonians 2:8-11 provides a NT example of this. It says:

8 Then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming;  
9 that is, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders,  
10 and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved.  
11 *For this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false,*  
12 in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness.

The people being spoken of are those who refuse to believe the truth (verse 10). Verse 11 says "for this reason," that is, because they refused to believe the truth, God sends a deluding spirit upon them so they will believe the lie. Why does he do this? Verse 12, "*in order that they all may be judged* who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness." God is not dealing with neutral people who He deceives, He is dealing with people who love lies, love their own man-made religions, can't bear the gospel, can't bear the God of the Bible, and won't believe the truth. At some point, God comes down in judicial sentence and says, "You love the lie, so continue to believe the lie." This is very similar to the scenario presented in Romans 1:18 ff. (see notes on that passage).

In other words, they get what they want. The fact that God is still merciful in all of this is bound up with this simple point: God in his mercy through Ezekiel tells them what He is doing.

2) Secondly, we cannot read into this that God stands behind good and evil in exactly the same way. God is sovereign; that is, God's sovereignty is so extensive, that at one level it embraces everything, both good and evil (nothing is outside of his sovereignty). However, this does not mean that His relationship to good and evil is the same; good is always accredited to God (Ja. 1:13-17) and evil is accredited to secondary causes.

A perfect example of this is found in Acts 4:27-28: "For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur."

In these verses there was a wicked conspiracy to kill Jesus, the holy servant of God. But God is in control of the wickedness. The wicked men could only do what God had predestined to occur. In this passage, wickedness is attributed to men, not God. At the same time, even the wickedness of men does not fall out of God's sovereign control.

We must believe that God is sovereign over evil for the Bible to make sense. If you believe that Jesus' death was simply the result of political conspiracy, then there is no sense in which we can say that God sent Him to die for our sins. The whole of the Bible is bound up with the fact that God has a sacrificial system and a priestly system with the lambs, and bulls, that all point to the need of a Lamb of God. But all this was not God's "Plan 'B'" when sin entered into the world. The book of Revelation pictures Jesus as the Lamb of God who was slain *before the foundation of the earth* (Rev. 13:8); in God's mind it was already done.

If God intended for Christ to be crucified, then Herod and Pontius Pilate were just doing what God had planned. On the other hand, if you only believe God's sovereignty, but do not believe that those who crucified Jesus were wicked when they acted, then they had no personal guilt or sin that needed to be paid for. We must believe that humans are responsible under the matchless, and sometimes mysterious, sovereignty of God.

God uses even evil to bring Him glory. He used the evil of Pontius Pilate to bring about His plan of redemption. So even though these prophets are speaking lies, God is sovereign, and even their lies are part of His judicial pronouncement upon them.

Carson observes that "sometimes judgment becomes so inevitable that not even the presence of the most righteous would delay it any longer (Ezek. 14:12-23). The reasoning presupposes the theology of Genesis 18: God may spare a wicked city or nation for the sake of the just who reside there. But where wickedness overflows, not even the presence of Noah (spared from the Flood), Job (declared "blameless" and "upright," Job 1:1), and Daniel (Ezekiel's contemporary, serving in the Babylonian courts, renowned for his piety) will stay the disaster that God ordains. Indeed, when the exiles see the revolting conduct of the new refugees, they will realize how right God was (Ezek. 14:22-23)" (Carson, *For the Love of God*, vol. 1, Sept. 26 meditation).

Although our circumstances differ from those of Ezekiel and his fellow exiles, this passage highlights several issues that are relevant for God's people of any era.

First, idolatry is essentially a matter of the mind/heart. In this text Yahweh's complaint is not directed at concrete images, but at the deluded hearts/minds in which such notions arise. If true religion is essentially a matter of the heart (Deut. 10:12-22), the same is true of any other worship. In the end it is misplaced internal spiritual commitments that provoke the passion and wrath of God.

Second, the temptation of syncretism poses a threat to God's people in every age. Ezekiel's compatriots offer a classic example of people "hopping between two opinions" (1 Ki. 18:21). Externally, their inquiry before the prophet appeared orthodox and commendable, but internally their spiritual commitments were pagan. Such persons may be able to camouflage their hypocrisy before humans, but it will not escape the scrutiny of God.

Third, even if the Lord invites all to come to him and knock, seek, and ask, he is under no obligation to respond to everyone who approaches him, especially not to those who demonstrate no covenant faithfulness in their daily lives. To receive a favorable answer from the divine King, one must come with sincerity and on his terms, among which is included his exclusive right to one's devotion. God tolerates no rivals. Nor does he permit himself to be reduced to a sorcerer's agent, disclosing future events and solving the problems of all who appear for his aid.

Fourth, so-called prophets of the Lord who acquiesce before the flattery and seductions of hypocritical inquirers become accomplices in their crimes and may expect the same punishment. Positions of privilege do not bring immunity from prosecution; they impose even greater accountability before the divine Lord and Judge. The prophets' task is to announce the truth and to call people to repentance for their sin, not to satisfy their lusts with false assurances of peace. True prophets are known by the divine authority of their message, not by the popularity of their pronouncements.

Fifth, the Lord remains gracious and merciful to all who repent of their sin. While warnings of imminent judgment may be interpreted as bailed signs of divine mercy, God's appeals to repentance offer specific hope for finding a sensitive ear with him. But the cry for mercy must be combined with the commitment to a new way of life. If Jonas' announcement of judgment upon Nineveh 40 days hence left open the room for escape, how much more God's invitation to his own people.

Sixth, the Lord is never capricious in his judgment. His responses to human sin are consistent with his immutable character and have as their goal the transformation of sinful human beings into a covenant people, pure and exclusive in their devotion to him.

(Block, NICOT, Ezekiel, vol. 1, 436, 437)