

"GOD'S RESPONSE TO FALSEHOOD IN THE CHURCH"

I. Introduction

- A. I was saddened, but not surprised, when I read the cover story in a recent edition of the local newspaper the "Gilford Steamer."
1. The story was about the speeches that four Gilford High School students recently delivered for a contest that was sponsored by the Gilford Rotary Club.
 2. The speech that was awarded the second-place prize dealt with the question, "What is the purpose of life?"
 3. What a great question!
 4. Unfortunately, the answer given in the speech was the sincere but erroneous exhortation, "Be better."
 5. The reason why this answer is false is because if you are going to define the meaning of life in terms of ethics, then you need to use God's ethical standard, which is not "Be better" but "Be perfect."
 6. As I said, it is sad to see an intelligent and articulate high schooler answering this question of supreme importance in this way, but it is not surprising.
 7. The reason why it is not surprising is because this fallen world is steeped in darkness and error.
 8. As the apostle Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4, "the god of this world [i.e. Satan] has blinded the minds of unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the glory of Christ." (2 Cor. 4:4)
 9. It is tragic to see the people of this world so oblivious to the fact that they are caught up in falsehood and error, but it is exactly what

we should expect to see.

10. Until God illuminates our hearts with the light of his truth in Jesus Christ, we are all mired in the deepest darkness when it comes to spiritual matters.
- B. Ezekiel 13 is not about the falsehood that is found in the world, but about the falsehood that is found in the church.
1. It is always the case that the most significant and consequential falsehood is found inside the church, and especially among the church's clergy.
 2. The reason why this form of falsehood is so bad is because the clergy claim to speak for God.
 3. A false teacher in the church is not only in the darkness himself; he is also leading others astray.
 4. It is a matter of the blind leading the blind.
 5. There are always going to be people in the church who love to have teachers who will tell them what they want to hear
 6. And there are always going to be people who are skilled at taking advantage of the opening that this provides.
 7. This is why it is important for us to give our careful consideration to what this chapter teaches about how the Lord deals with falsehood in his church.

II. False Teaching in the Church (1-7)

- A. This chapter can be divided into two main sections that consist of two parts each.
1. The first section describes false teaching in the covenant community, and then it sets forth God's judgment upon those false

teachers or false prophets.

2. The second section describes superstitious practices in the covenant community, and then it sets forth God's judgment upon the purveyors of these practices.
 3. We begin by looking at the first part of the first section, where the focus is upon the false prophets who were plaguing God's people.
 4. God tells Ezekiel to "prophesy against the prophets of Israel."
 5. The context makes it clear that the Lord is not referring to Israel's true prophets but to the false prophets who were in their midst.
 6. These people called themselves prophets and they delivered messages that began with the prophetic formula, "Thus says the LORD," but the Lord was against them.
 7. The same is true of anyone today who claims to speak for God but who does not speak God's Word.
 8. A person may hold the title of pastor and work in a church and deliver sermons, but if that person fails to declare what God has revealed in the Bible, then God is against that person.
- B. The next thing that the Lord says about these false prophets is that they "prophesy from their own hearts."
1. They are self-inspired rather than Holy Spirit-inspired.
 2. They tell the people what the people want to hear.
 3. They claim divine authority for opinions and ideas that they come up with on their own.
 4. There are many in our day who do the exact same thing.
 5. There are ministers and teachers who look at what is popular and acceptable in the broader culture and then adapt and alter the

church's teachings accordingly.

6. They claim to be speaking for God, but the things that they say have their origin in their own hearts rather than in the Word of God.
- C. In verse 4 the Lord refers to Israel's false prophets as "jackals among the ruins."
1. That is, they prey upon God's beleaguered people.
 2. They try to capitalize on the city's ruin.
 3. Because the speak lies instead of the truth, they fail to do anything to shore up Jerusalem's spiritual defenses.
 4. If they were true prophets they would have set themselves to rebuilding the spiritual walls of the city by calling for repentance and spiritual revitalization.
 5. Instead, they only made matters worse by delivering false oracles that gave the people a false sense of security that would be exposed when the approaching judgment comes.

III. God's Judgment upon False Teachers (8-16)

- A. This brings us to verses 8-16, where the Lord declares his judgment upon Israel's false prophets.
1. The Lord says that he is against the false prophets because they have uttered lies in his name.
 2. His hand will be against them because of their false teaching.
 3. Those words should have been utterly terrifying to these prophets.
 4. There is nothing worse than having God against you.

5. This is the consequence of spreading falsehood among God's people.
 6. Anyone who claims to speak for God and then says things that God has not said has makes God his enemy.
- B. In verse 9, the Lord says that three things will happen to the false prophets because of the lies that they have spoken.
1. They will not be in the council of God's people.
 2. They will not be enrolled in the house of Israel.
 3. And they will not enter the land of Israel.
 4. This is essentially the same thing as excommunication.
 5. The false prophets will be cut off from God's people and they will not participate in the return from the exile.
 6. The same basic judgment should be rendered by the church today against anyone who spreads falsehood in the church and is unrepentant about it when confronted.
 7. If a church fails to do this, if it does not keep watch over its teaching, then false teaching will spread like wildfire and it will not be long before that church is no longer a true church at all.
- C. The Lord also rebukes Israel's false prophets because they declared that there would be peace when there was no peace.
1. They said that all would be well when in reality the nation was on the brink of ruin.
 2. After the devastation brought about when the Babylonians carried off the first wave of exiles, the people tried to recover some sense of security, but most of them did not repent of their sins.

3. This is illustrated with the image of putting up a wall.
4. It was as if the people put up a flimsy wall that was not going to do them any good, but the false prophets painted over that wall with whitewash and assured the people that everything would be okay.
5. The Lord declares that he will send the elements against that wall and bring it down.
6. This is the fate that lies in store for everyone who builds up false hopes on the basis of false teaching.
7. The day will come when their hopes will be dashed to pieces.
8. There cannot be any true hope apart from God's truth.

IV. Superstition in the Church (17-19)

- A. We turn now to the second half of the chapter, where the focus is upon some women in Israel who were engaging in superstitious practices.
 1. Like the false prophets, these women also claimed to speak for God, and their alleged words of prophecy came out of their own minds rather than from the Lord.
 2. Our text tells us that they used instruments of divination.
 3. They made some kind of magical band that was worn on the arm and some other article that was worn on the head.
 4. While we do not know exactly how they used these things, it is clear that they were part of some kind of occult practice.
 5. These women were witches.
 6. The fact that this activity was taking place among the Israelites at the time of the Babylonian threat reminds us that people are especially susceptible to occult practices during times of crisis.

7. Magic offers power and control, and those are the very things that people are looking for when the world around them is crumbling.
- B. As the Lord describes what these women were doing, he says that they were hunting down the souls of his people for their own advantage.
1. In other words, in collecting payments for their magical services, they were destroying people's lives.
 2. Here is another picture of the devastating effect of false teaching in the church.
 3. Those who disseminate lies end up destroying souls.
 4. And if that was not bad enough, the Lord also points out the blasphemous nature of what these women were doing.
 5. They profaned the Lord's name because they were apparently using it in their magical incantations.
 6. They were claiming to have the power to manipulate the Lord.
 7. They were setting Israel's God alongside the various gods of the Babylonians.
 8. They were essentially treating the Lord like a genie in a lamp.

V. God's Judgment upon Purveyors of Superstition (20-23)

- A. If we had any question about how God viewed this, his response is made clear in the final paragraph of the chapter.
1. Once again, he declares that he is against the magical instruments that these women were using.
 2. He is going to destroy the tools of their trade and make it clear to everyone that they have nothing to offer.

3. This is the judgment that lies in store for all who engage in superstitious practices.
 4. They will eventually be exposed as charlatans.
- B. God also declares that he will rescue his exploited people from the clutches of these witches.
1. Apparently, these women were using their magic to threaten the righteous in Israel.
 2. This seems to indicate that they were placing curses on those who believed the Lord's true prophets and who refused to listen to the lies of the false prophets.
 3. On top of that, these women were encouraging the wicked to go on with their wicked deeds, and they were discouraging them from repenting.
 4. It is difficult for God's people when those who claim to speak for God chastise them for believing what God has revealed in his Word.
 5. And it is deadly when false teachers encourage people to commit sin and affirm what is not true.
 6. There is plenty of this going on in the church today.
 7. As we see this happening, we can take comfort in knowing that the Lord will not let his true church be destroyed by falsehood.
 8. He has promised that he will deliver his people from the hands of those who speak lies in his name.

VI. Conclusion

- A. In a sense, it is a lot easier to be a teacher of the truth than it is to be a false teacher.

1. I am so grateful that I do not have to come up with the message that I am going to deliver when I am preparing a sermon.
 2. I simply have to consider how I can clearly explain and apply the message that God has given in his Word.
 3. The false teacher has a more difficult job.
 4. He has to put his finger to the wind, determine what it is that people want to hear, and then figure out the most effective way to deliver that message.
- B. Until the Lord returns, we will always have false teachers in the various branches of Christ's church.
1. But we can take comfort in knowing that the Lord is fully aware of what these false teachers are doing.
 2. The Lord will shepherd all of those who truly belong to the flock that Christ purchased with his blood.
 3. He will ensure that none for whom Christ died is lost.
 4. And one day, he will root falsehood and all who spread it out of his church forever.