

False Prophetic Pronouncements of Prosperity: An Exegetical Study and Reflection of Ezekiel 13:1–16

Florah Misigo Kidula
Email: flowkidula@gmail.com

Abstract

False prosperity preaching is a fast-growing phenomenon within Christian ministry circles across the globe. This phenomenon traces back to biblical times, although manifested in different forms. Ezekiel 13:1–16 is an example of such false prophetic proclamations of prosperity. This paper employs a historical-grammatical approach to examine an instance of the proclamation of false prosperity in Ezekiel 13:1–16. It also reflects how this event sheds light on similar phenomena in the church today. The study text is a prophetic oracle of indictment and judgment concerning the prophets of Israel during the exile before the final destruction of Jerusalem. The prophets are indicted for prophesying peace to the people where there is no peace, falsely claiming to speak on behalf of Yahweh, and speaking prophecies out of their own imagination. In addition, they are judged for failing to mobilise the nation towards repentance and intercede before Yahweh for the pardon of the nation, engaging in the forbidden practice of divination, and taking advantage of the spiritually broken nation for their own profit. A reflection on these observations points out some key characteristics of the perpetrators of false prophetic pronouncements. These include misrepresentation of the truth of Yahweh, preaching of messages to please the crowds, carrying out ministry for selfish gain, lack of genuine concern for the devotion of the people to Yahweh, and even meddling with other forms of spirituality to have something to offer their hearers.

Keywords: False Prosperity, Prophet Ezekiel, False, Prophets, Prophetic Pronouncements



Introduction

False prosperity pronouncement is the proclamation of messages of present welfare (peace, wealth, health, victory etc.) to believers and the claim that these are their rights as God's children. The rampant propagation of prosperity pronouncements, at the expense of the holistic gospel, has caught the public eye, especially that of governments and civil rights organisations. On 11 November 2014, the Office of the Attorney General and Department of Justice of the Kenyan Government issued a press statement to enact a moratorium on registering religious societies. One of the driving forces behind this move was the observation of increasing manipulative practices of prosperity gospel preachers as reported through media platforms.¹ One notable observation was that church leaders acquire money from their congregants in the famous '*panda mbegu*' (Swahili for 'sowing a seed') preaching, which promises believers financial returns for their offerings. However, the general observation in these churches has been that ill-informed believers end up poorer and desperate while the perpetrators of the teachings grow wealthier. The phenomenon is worth a biblical reflection for believers to beware, understand and challenge it. The scriptures offer a vast resource to believers in matters of pronouncements of false prosperity pronouncements (cf. 1 Kgs 22:1–28; 2 Chron 18:1–27; Jer 6: 9–15, 23:9–22, 27:12–15, 27:16–22, 28:1–17; Mic 3:5–12 and Ezek 13:1–16; Matt 7:15–20; 24:24; Luke 6:26; 2 Tim 4:3–4).

The objective of this paper is to exegete and reflect on an instance of judgment against false prosperity pronouncements by the prophet Ezekiel. The book of Ezekiel contains themes such as the transcendence of God, sin, judgment, individual responsibility and hope for restoration.² The study text, Ezekiel 13:1–16, is found within the judgment oracles of the book. It contains two charges against prophets: false prophecy and neglect of their prophetic duty. Of the two charges, the prophets' false pronouncements are of key interest in this study. This paper identifies the contexts and content of the prosperity messages, the circumstances of the adherents and perpetrators, the grounds and motivations of the false prophets and the functions of the messages to concerned recipients in the covenantal context of the nation of

¹ "Press Statement On Proposed Churches Law," *State Law Office and Department of Justice*, n.d., accessed May 2, 2020, <https://www.statelaw.go.ke/press-statement-on-proposed-churches-law/>.

² Iain M. Duguid, *Ezekiel*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 1999), 35–39; John B. Taylor, *Ezekiel: An Introduction and Commentary*, The Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (London: Tyndale P, 1969), 39–46; Lamar Eugene Cooper, *Ezekiel*, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 40–44.



Israel. In so doing, the study will establish some key aspects of the theology of false prosperity pronouncements and draw instructive lessons from this theology for the contemporary church where prosperity preaching is fast growing. The paper will begin with a background study of the text (both historical and literal) in order to factor in the context of the pronouncements, which greatly inform the theme of the study.

Authorship, Dating and Original Audience

Despite a few critics who find reasons to suggest multiple or alternative authorship and redactions of the book of Ezekiel,³ many commentators maintain (as is the case in this study) that the sixth-century prophet, Ezekiel, is its author on account of the book's stark uniformity.⁴

The book tends to provide exact dates of events⁵ in relation to Jehoiachin's exile (597 BC). The earliest date in the book is 592 BC, the fifth year of Jehoiachin's exile, and the rest of the book's dates (except one in 29:17–21) cover 20 years, up to 571 BC. There is no surety of the book's composition date. Tuell dates it early into the 5th century (522–485 BC) during

³ See Taylor, *Ezekiel*, 14, 16; Heinrich Ewald, "Die Propheten Des Alten Bundes Erklart," in *Jeremja Und Hezeqiel*, vol. 2 (Gottingen, 1868), 207; Duguid, *Ezekiel*, 23–25; William Hugh Brownlee, *Ezekiel 1-19*, Word Biblical Commentary 28 (Waco, Tex: Word Books, 1986), xix–xxiii, xxxvi; I. G. Matthews, "Ezekiel," in *An American Commentary on the OT* (Philadelphia: The American Baptist Publication Society, 1939); Flavius Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, vol. Book 8, n.d., 10.5.1 (79); Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer, "Ezekiel, Book Of," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Prophets*, ed. Mark J. Boda and J. G. McConville (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Academic, 2012), 214. Taylor discusses some of the views disputing single authorship by Ezekiel such as those of Josephus, Kraetzschmar, Holscher, C. C. Torrey and James Smith. Some of the points of argument include the mixture of symbolism with facts, literary unity, and fiction- sounding narratives. Ewald postulated that the book arose out of multiple strata. Duguid discusses four positions of authorship including views of Gustav Holscher (who attributed only 144 verses to Ezekiel), C. C. Torrey (argued for a post-exilic work dating 230 BC), Walther Zimmerli (postulated that it was completed by the end of the exilic period), and the modern conservative view of coherence. Brownlee discusses the history of criticism.

⁴ Steven Shawn Tuell, *Ezekiel*, Old Testament Series New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc, 2009), 2; Taylor, *Ezekiel*, 14; George Buchanan Gray, *A Critical Introduction to the Old Testament* (University of Michigan Library, 1913), 198; John William Wevers, *Ezekiel*, New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids : London: Eerdmans ; Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1982), 1, 30–37; Rudolf Smend, *Der Prophet Ezechiel* (Leipzig: KeH, 18800), xxi; Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel, Chapters 1-24*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI, USA: Eerdmans, 1997), 16; Duguid, *Ezekiel*, 25; Samuel R. Driver, *Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament* (New York: Scribner's, 1913), 279; Cooper, *Ezekiel*, 31–37. Taylor discusses six reasons why the book must be attributed to Ezekiel including its balanced structure, the consistency of the message, uniformity of style and language, clear chronological sequence, consistent first-person addressee, and the unified characterization of the prophet throughout the book. Wevers discusses these features, adding its historical probability. See also Cooper's discussion on the same.

⁵ Tuell, *Ezekiel*, 2. There are sixteen instances where the dates of visions are provided, eleven of these being precise to the day.



the Persian era.⁶ The material was likely written during the exilic period before the end of the sixth century because it shows no awareness of the conditions of Judah after the exile.⁷ It reached its final form at once, later in Ezekiel's life, instead of having had a piecemeal compilation.⁸ This study will only focus on the final form of the book.

The message of Ezekiel went out to the exiles, primarily those in Babylon (1:1; 3:11; 3:15; 8:3; 11:24), even though he was much preoccupied with the state of Jerusalem and its inhabitants before its destruction (11:15; 12:21-28; 20:32; 33:23-29). Nevertheless, his message was relevant to the exiles since they identified with the audience back in Jerusalem.⁹

Historical Background

Ezekiel experienced the end of Assyrian dominance, some Egyptian influence and the rise and control of the Babylonian empire, all these within the reigns of five Judean kings.¹⁰ Ezekiel was taken captive by the Babylonians in 597 BC together with the young King Jehoiachin and the leading citizens in Jerusalem (2 Kgs 24:14). At that time, Babylon was ruled by Nebuchadnezzar II (605-562). The Babylonians, later in 586 BC, destroyed the city of Jerusalem and the temple. This tragic news reached Ezekiel and the exiles the following year (33:21-22), although Ezekiel had already foreseen the destruction of the city (3:22-5:17).

Ezekiel was a prophet of priestly descent (1:3)¹¹ whose ministry was entirely in Babylon, ministering to the Israelite exiles (Ezek 1:1-3; 3:11, 15; 11:24). His call came in the fifth year of exile (593 BC). He was likely in his mid to late twenties at his call.¹² He ministered until at least 571 BC, which was the date of his last dated prophecy (29:17).¹³ Ezekiel was influential among the exiles at this time of crisis, even being consulted by the elders (8:1; 20:1). He was a contemporary of Jeremiah, who ministered from Jerusalem.

⁶ Tuell, 3.

⁷ Wevers, *Ezekiel*, 29.

⁸ Taylor, *Ezekiel*, 14; A. B. Davidson, "The Book of the Prophet Ezekiel," in *Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges, 1892), ix; Smend, *Der Prophet Ezechiel*, xxii.

⁹ Moshe Greenberg, ed., *Ezekiel 1-20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 1st ed, The Anchor Bible, v. 22 (Garden City, N.Y: Doubleday, 1983), 17.

¹⁰ The kings being Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin and Zedekiah (spanning 640- 587 BC).

¹¹ Tuell, *Ezekiel*, 1; Wevers, *Ezekiel*, 23; Tiemeyer, "Ezekiel, Book Of," 216. This is confirmed by the use of priestly texts and ideas throughout the book, especially from Leviticus.

¹² Taylor, *Ezekiel*, 21.

¹³ Wevers, *Ezekiel*, 23.



While these are the two major recognised exilic prophets,¹⁴ many people identified themselves as prophets during this period.¹⁵ Ezekiel 13 suggests that other ‘prophets’ in the Israelite community circles in Babylon pronounced prophecies in the public spaces.¹⁶ Some of these prophets were spreading the false hope that Egypt, an anti-Babylonian nation, was providing for those threatened by Babylon through their rebellion.¹⁷

Ezekiel’s location in Babylon is the plain, Tel Abib, near the River Chebar (3:22; 37:1), where the exiles were settled.¹⁸ Tel Abib was once abandoned by the Babylonians, who later assigned it to settle the exiles.¹⁹

Literary Context and Form

The book of Ezekiel can fall into two sections, chapters 1—3, which focus on the judgment (of Jerusalem [4–24, 33] and other nations [25–32])²⁰, and chapters 34—48, which contain oracles and visions of restoration and hope.²¹ Ezekiel prophesied doom to the disobedient, but after the destruction of Jerusalem, his message shifted to hope and restoration. Our study text is within the judgment section and is one of the four distinct prophecies concerning prophets between 12:21 and 14:11. It is similar to 13:17–23, which addresses sorcerous women.

The book has a uniform style and a simple framework.²² Ezekiel’s work bears recurring themes,²³ symbolic language, long prose narratives and varied oracular forms.²⁴ The study text contains woe oracles (13:3–7) and judgment oracles (13:8–16).²⁵

¹⁴ Not to mention figures like Uriah (Jer 26:20-23) and Hananiah (Jer 28:1-17).

¹⁵ Taylor, *Ezekiel*, 35.

¹⁶ Tiemeyer, “Ezekiel, Book Of,” 215; A. Mein, *Ezekiel and the Ethics of Exile* (OTM, Oxford: Oxford University Press, n.d.), 66–73.

¹⁷ Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 14.

¹⁸ Greenberg, 15. Some critical views refute the idea that Ezekiel would passionately address the situation in Jerusalem without being physically present there. They argue for a Judean setting, and avoid associating his message with the supernatural activity claimed in the text.

¹⁹ Walther Zimmerli, *Ezekiel I: Chapters 1-24*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1979), 16; Martin Noth, *The History of Israel*, trans. Stanley Godman (New York: Harper and Row, 1960), 292f.

²⁰ The section is bracketed by Ezekiel’s role as a watchman (Ezek 3:16-21; 33:1-9), and his muteness (2:5; 33:22)

²¹ See Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Ezekiel*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville, Ky: J. Knox Press, 1990), 5., who, focusing on Jerusalem, classifies the book into 3 parts, 1—24 (judgment of Jerusalem); 25—33 (transition to salvation through judgment of other nations); 34—48 (prospect of restoration and hope). This classification is justified based on the strict focus of themes on Israel. The classification of 1—33 and 34—48 as is in this study is based on general themes.

²² Tuell, *Ezekiel*, 1; Taylor, *Ezekiel*, 13.

²³ Taylor, *Ezekiel*, 40.

²⁴ Tiemeyer, “Ezekiel, Book Of,” 218.

²⁵ Wevers, *Ezekiel*, 17.



Structural Outline

Indictment and woe oracles (vv. 1–7)

vv. 1–3: Indictment concerning the source of prophecies

vv. 4–5: Charges against the prophets: breaches and walls

vv. 6–7: Charges against the prophets: vanities and lies

Judgment oracles (vv. 8–16)

vv. 8–9: Means of judgment: exclusion from the covenant community

v. 10: Grounds for judgment

vv. 11–15: Means of judgment: rain, wind and hailstones

v. 16: Objects of judgment

Exegetical Study of Key Sections

This section does not strictly follow the outline provided. Rather, it focuses on the themes in the text, paying more attention to those directly related to false prosperity pronouncements. Three areas have been identified, which are: the nature of the prophets and the source of their prophecies (vv. 1–3; 6–9), indictment concerning breaches and coated walls (vv. 4–5; 10b, 11–15) and misleading utterances of peace (vv. 10a, 16). Below I have provided a translation of the selected text.



Text and Translation

1 The word of the Lord came to me saying,

¹ וַיְהִי דְבַר־יְהוָה אֵלַי לֵאמֹר:

2“Son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel who are prophesying, and say to the prophets of their own hearts, ‘Hear the word of the Lord.’

² בְּנֵי־אָדָם הַנְּבִיאִים הַנְּבִיאִים יִשְׂרָאֵל הַנְּבִיאִים וְאָמַרְתָּ לְנְבִיאֵי מַלְבָּם שְׁמַעוּ דְבַר־יְהוָה:

3 Thus says the Lord God, ‘Woe unto the foolish prophets who follow after their spirits but have seen nothing.

³ כֹּה אָמַר אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה הוּא עַל־הַנְּבִיאִים הַנְּבִלִים אֲשֶׁר הִלְכִים אַחֲרֵי רוּחָם וּלְבַלְתִּי רָאוּ:

4 Israel, your prophets have become like jackals among ruins

⁴ כְּשַׁעֲלִים בְּחִרְבוֹת נְבִיאֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל הֵיוּ:

5 You have not gone into the breaches or repaired the wall over the house of Israel, to stand in battle in the Day of the Lord.

⁵ לֹא עָלִיתָם בְּפְרָצוֹת וַתְּגַדְּרוּ גֵדֵר עַל־בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל לַעֲמֹד בַּמִּלְחָמָה בְּיוֹם יְהוָה:

6 They have seen vanity and deceptive divination saying, ‘Declares the Lord’ but the Lord has not sent them, yet they hope for the fulfillment of the word.

⁶ חָזוּ שׁוֹא וְקֶסֶם כָּזָב הָאֹמְרִים נֹאֵם־יְהוָה וַיְהוֶה לֹא שְׁלָחַם וַיַּחֲלוּ לְקִים דְּבָר:

7 Have you not seen a vain vision and spoken a lying divination when you have said, ‘Declares the Lord’ when I have not spoken?

⁷ הֲלוֹא מַחְזֶה־שׁוֹא חָזִיתָם וּמִקֶּסֶם כָּזָב אָמַרְתֶּם וְאָמְרִים נֹאֵם־יְהוָה וְאֲנִי לֹא דִבַּרְתִּי: ס

8 Therefore, thus says Adonai Yahweh, ‘Because you have spoken vanity and seen lies, therefore behold, I am against you,’ declares the Lord God.

⁸ לְכֹן כֹּה אָמַר אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה יַעַן דִּבַּרְכֶּם שׁוֹא וְחָזִיתֶם כָּזָב לְכֹן הִנֵּנִי אֵלֵיכֶם נֹאֵם אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה:

9 My hand will be against the prophets who see vanity and divine falsehood. They shall not be in the council of my people and they will not be written in the registry of the house of Israel and they will not come into the land of Israel, and you shall know that I am the Lord.

⁹ וְהִיְתָה יָדִי אֶל־הַנְּבִיאִים הַחֹזִים שׁוֹא וְהַקְסָמִים כָּזָב בְּסֹד עַמִּי לֹא־יְהִיוּ וּבִכְתָּב בֵּית־יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא יִכְתְּבוּ וְאֶל־אֲדָמַת יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא יָבֹאוּ וַיֵּדְעֻם כִּי אֲנִי אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה:

10 Definitely because they have led my people astray, saying ‘peace’ when there’s no peace, and when one builds a wall, behold, they coat it with whitewash.

¹⁰ יַעַן וּבִיָּעַן הִטְעוּ אֶת־עַמִּי לֵאמֹר שְׁלוֹם וְאִין שְׁלוֹם וְהוּא בָנָה חֲזִין וְהִנֵּם טָחִים אֹתוֹ תִּפֹּל:

11 Say to those who coat it with whitewash, it will fall. There will be an overflowing rain, and you O hailstones will fall, and a stormy wind will burst forth.

¹¹ אָמַר אֶל־טָחֵי תִּפֹּל וַיִּפֹּל הָיָה גֶשֶׁם שׁוֹטֵף וְאֹתָנָה אֲבָנֵי אֲלֻגִּישׁ תִּפְלֶנָּה וְרוּחַ סַעֲרֹת תִּבְקַע:

12 And behold, when the wall falls, will it not be said to you, ‘Where is the coating which you coated’?

¹² וְהִנֵּה נָפַל הַקִּיר הֲלוֹא יֹאמַר אֵלֵיכֶם אֵיךְ הִטַּיִח אֲשֶׁר טָחַתֶּם: ס

13 Therefore, thus says the Lord God, ‘I will break out a stormy wind in my rage and overflowing rain in my anger and there will be hailstones to completely destroy it in wrath.

¹³ לְכֹן כֹּה אָמַר אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה וּבִקְעָתִי רוּחַ־סַעֲרֹת בְּחֻמָּתִי וּגֶשֶׁם שׁוֹטֵף בְּאַפִּי יְהִי וְאֲבָנֵי אֲלֻגִּישׁ בְּחֻמָּה לְכֹלָה:

14 I will throw down the wall which you have covered with whitewash and strike it to the ground and its foundation will be uncovered. And it shall fall and you will be consumed in its midst, and you will know that I am Yahweh.

¹⁴ וְהָרַסְתִּי אֶת־הַקִּיר אֲשֶׁר־טָחַתָּם תִּפֹּל וְהִגַּעְתִּיהוּ אֶל־הָאָרֶץ וּנְגַלָּה יְסֹד וְנִפְלָה וְכִלְיָתָם בְּתוֹכָהּ וַיֵּדְעֻם כִּי־אֲנִי יְהוִה:

15 I will spend my anger on the wall and the ones who overlaid it with whitewash, and I will say to you, ‘There is no wall and those who coated it are no more,

¹⁵ וְכִלְיָתִי אֶת־חֻמָּתִי בְּקִיר וּבְטָחִים אֹתוֹ תִּפֹּל וְאֹמַר לְכֶם אִין הַקִּיר וְאִין הַטָּחִים אֹתוֹ:

16 prophets of Israel who prophesy to Jerusalem seeing visions of peace for her when there is no peace,’ declares the Lord.

¹⁶ נְבִיאֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הַנְּבִיאִים אֶל־יְרוּשָׁלַם וְהַחֲזִים לָהּ חֲזוֹן שְׁלָם וְאִין שְׁלָם נֹאֵם אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה: פ



The Nature of the Prophets and the Source of their Prophecies (vv. 1–3; 6–9)

Verses 1–3 and 6–9 list accusations, exposing the nature of the prophets and their prophecies. Whereas Ezekiel receives ‘the word of the Lord’ (דְּבַר־יְהוָה; v.1), the other prophets are described as ‘those who prophecy from their hearts’ (לְנִבְיָאִי מִלִּבָּם; v.2b), ‘foolish prophets’ (הַנְּבִיאִים הַנְּבִלִים; v.3), ‘prophets who follow after their spirits’ (הַנְּבִיאִים אֲחֵרֵי רוּחָם; v.3), prophets who ‘have seen nothing’ (וְלִבְלֹתִי רָאוּ; v.3), prophets who have seen vain visions and deceptive divinations (וְהָיוּ שְׂוֹא וְקֶסֶם כְּזָב; vv. 6a,7a), and finally, prophets who falsely claim to have received their word from Yahweh and expect their prophecies to come to pass (vv. 6b, 7b).

Ezekiel claims in this text, and throughout the entire book, that Yahweh is the source of his prophetic utterances (cf. v. 3: יְהוָה אָמַר אֵלַי יְהוָה, ‘thus says the Lord Yahweh’).²⁶ The phrase דְּבַר־יְהוָה appears 127 times in 31 out of 48 of the chapters. The other prophets also claim to have an oracle from Yahweh (נֹאמֵי־יְהוָה), but Yahweh denies having spoken to them or having sent them (vv. 6b, 7b). However, they are referred to as נְבִיאֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל ‘prophets of Israel,’ which hints at some official status, legitimacy or acceptance in the community.²⁷ So, what is the source of their prophecies?

Verse 2b describes the prophets as לְנִבְיָאִי מִלִּבָּם²⁸ ‘prophets from their hearts’ (a genitive of origin).²⁹ The מִן preposition also designates the source of the prophecies,³⁰ which is their hearts. Their prophecies were their wishful hopes³¹ based on their personal preferences and tendencies, not Yahweh’s desires (cf Jer 23:16; 9:13; 23:16; Ezek 13:17; 1 Kgs 12:33).

This contrasts with Ezekiel, who, as earlier noted, receives his prophecies from Yahweh. The construction of v. 2 is irregular because of the repetition of the verb הִנְבִּיאִים in

²⁶ The LXX omits the title ‘Yahweh’ in this expression. Also in vv. 8 (twice), 9, 13 and 16.

²⁷ Peter C. Craigie, *Ezekiel*, Daily Study Bible--Old Testament (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983), 90; Walther Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, Old Testament Library (Richmond: Westminster John Knox Press, 1970), 162; Thomas H. Leale, “Ezekiel XII–XXIX,” in *The Preacher’s Complete Homiletic Commentary on the Books of the Bible with Critical and Explanatory Notes, Indexes, Etc., by Various Authors.* (New York, NY: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 2011), 139.

²⁸ See Zimmerli, *Ezekiel I*, 285; Block, *The Book of Ezekiel, Chapters 1–24*, 396.: the redundancy is original as it is attested in 11:4; 34:2; 37:9. It is preferred on the principle of *lectio difficilior*.

²⁹ Paul Joüon and T. Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, Subsidia Biblica, 14/1–14/2 (Roma: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblio, 1991), 437. The origin being of the implied prophecies in the phrase.

³⁰ Bill T. Arnold and John H. Choi, *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (New York, N.Y: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 116.

³¹ H. A. Ironside, *Expository Notes on Ezekiel, the Prophet*, 1st ed. (New York: Loizeaux Bros, 1949), 82.



this participle form which seems redundant, and the use of the irregular construct לְנִבִּיאֵי מְלָכִים. The Septuagint omits the expression לְנִבִּיאֵי מְלָכִים and replaces it with πρὸς αὐτούς (to them). It also uses the indicative future second person singular form of הִנְבְּאֵם (προφητεύσεις) which means that it applies to Ezekiel and not to the prophets. The BHS editor suggests transposing הִנְבְּאֵם to serve as the verb for מְלָכִים and deleting לְנִבִּיאֵי hence the section would read, ‘...to the prophets of Israel, and say to those prophesying from their hearts.’ The LXX omission is unfounded, and revising the construction as BHS suggests, though smoother, does not alter the implied meaning of the sentence. Moreover, no manuscript evidence supports the proposed emendations; hence, they can be disregarded. Some commentators see the redundancy as possibly enhancing the meaning of the sentence, to emphasise that the prophets ‘rant’ or, as Davidson describes it, ‘they prophesy and that without limit.’³² The redundancy is expected since it is witnessed in other parts of the book (cf. 11:4; 34:2), and this MT reading is preferred here based on the principle of *lectio difficilior*.³³

In verse 3, Ezekiel pronounces woe to the prophets, a cry of grief due to the unavoidable coming doom.³⁴ He refers to them as ‘prophets who follow after their spirit’ (הַנְּבִלִים אֲשֶׁר הִלְכִּים אַחֲרֵי רוּחָם). The concept of ‘the spirit’ is significant in the book of Ezekiel. Oftentimes, the Spirit of Yahweh is involved in imparting knowledge or visions, empowering and reviving (cf. Ezek 2:2; 3:24; 36:27; 37:14; 39:29).³⁵ In 11:5, Ezekiel tells of ‘the Spirit of Yahweh’ falling upon him to impart words of prophecy to him. By contrast, the רוּחַ in Ezekiel 13:3 refers to the prophets’ own nature, attitude, characteristics or quality (cf. Ezek 18:31; 11:19), informing and empowering their prophetic ministry. Whereas the Spirit of Yahweh empowers a true prophet, false prophets follow their own spirit.

One of the qualities of the prophets mentioned in v. 3 is that they are ‘foolish’ (a word play on the similar sounding הַנְּבִלִים and הַנְּבִיאִים). Some commentators argue that הַנְּבִלִים means more than their lack of good judgment and that the tendencies of ‘folly’ as described in the OT, such as religious and moral depravity, apply to them. It means that they likely blasphemed (Ps 74:18), did not believe in Yahweh (Ps 14:1) and were arrogant (1 Sam 25:25)

³² A. B. Davidson, and A. W. Streane, *Ezekiel*, Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1916), <https://www.amazon.com/Cambridge-Bible-Schools-Colleges-Ezekiel/dp/B00F9JD5OA>; Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 234; Block, *The Book of Ezekiel, Chapters 1-24*, 399.

³³ Block, *The Book of Ezekiel, Chapters 1-24*, 396.

³⁴ Block, 400.

³⁵ Keith W. Carley, *Ezekiel among the Prophets: A Study of Ezekiel's Place in Prophetic Tradition*, Studies in Biblical Theology: Second Series No 31 (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1975), 24–36.



and immoral (2 Sam 13:13).³⁶ Despite these views, the adjective הַנְּבִלִים in this occurrence more directly captures the sacrilegious behaviour of the prophets who prophesy from their own hearts, when they are expected to receive visions from God (cf Prov 30:32).³⁷ However, the aspect of immorality cannot be ignored, because folly is assumed to result in such acts. Isaiah describes נָבֵל ‘the fool’ as one who is wicked and bent on iniquity, withholds good from the needy, and proclaims error against the Lord (Isa 32:6). The views above from commentators demonstrate that folly results in, or is packaged with immorality and dishonour of God. They are also described as those who have seen nothing (וַיִּלְבְּתִי רֵאָיו; v. 3), which implies that they have not received any form of revelation from Yahweh.

Three times, the attributive genitive, בְּנֵי הַנְּבִלִים calls out their divinations as lies (vv. 6, 7, 9). The prophets engaged themselves in the foreign practice of divination,³⁸ which was considered illegal and anti-Yahwistic (cf. Lev 19:26–31; Deut 18:9–14). It was a humanly inspired method of foretelling.³⁹ Divination was widespread in the ANE, and the Israelites easily got lured into it. The practice is associated with false prophecies (cf. Lev 19:26–31; Deut 18:9–14; 2 Kgs 21:1–7; Ezek 22:28; 13:6,7,23; Zech 10:2) and with foreign cults.⁴⁰ Ezekiel associates it with false prophets (Ezek 13:6, 7, 8, 23; 22:28), women who practised magic (13:23) and the king of Babylon, who divined by shaking arrows, consulting idols and examining the liver (Ezek 21:21). True prophets are never associated with divination.⁴¹ It was not enough that they engaged in this practice: the counterfeit prophets were also faking the outcomes of divination, as they divined deceptions (בְּנֵי הַנְּבִלִים; vv. 6, 7, 9). They had no revelation, even when it came to forbidden practices. Possibly, this practice profited them because it required a fee (Num 22:7).

³⁶ Taylor, *Ezekiel*, 120; Tuell, *Ezekiel*, 72; Cooper, *Ezekiel*, 154; Block, *The Book of Ezekiel, Chapters 1--24*, 400; Walther Zimmerli, Frank Moore Cross, and Klaus Baltzer, *Ezekiel: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel*, Hermeneia--a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 292; Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1--20*, 154.

³⁷ David J. A. Clines, ed., *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* א–י, vol. V (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 593.

³⁸ Malcolm J. A. Horsnell, “קסם,” in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*, ed. Willem VanGemeren, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 1997), 945; James Limburg, *Hosea-Micah*, Interpretation (Richmond: Westminster John Knox Press, 1988), act 176.

³⁹ Cooper, *Ezekiel*, 154.

⁴⁰ Daniel J. Simundson, *Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah*, Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), 311.

⁴¹ Wevers, *Ezekiel*, 86.



Their visions are also associated with vanity three times in the text (חֲזוֹן שָׁוְא; vv. 6, 7, 9). Ezekiel frequently uses the noun חֲזוֹן in describing visions, and the expression חֲזוֹן שָׁוְא is paralleled with נְאֻם כָּזָב ‘false divinations’ in four occurrences in the book (13:6, 7, 8, 9; 21:34; 21:34). Once, Ezekiel uses שוֹא to describe the divinations (21:28), and once, the visions of the same prophets are termed as lies (חֲזוֹנֵיהֶם כָּזָב; 13:8). Ezekiel seems to use the two terms interchangeably to communicate the false nature of the visions and divinations (due to their hollowness). The two nuances, vanity and falsehood, convey the idea of ineffectiveness or untrustworthiness.⁴² By being unfounded or founded on the wrong object (the prophet’s own inspiration), the visions of these prophets abound to nothing as they are false.

The falsehood in their revelations is demonstrated by the prophets’ claim to speak on behalf of Yahweh (vv. 6, 7b). The messenger formulae נֹאֵם יְהוָה ‘Declares the Lord,’ or כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה is a strong claim that a prophet’s message bears Yahweh’s authority (as other prophets such as Ezekiel, Jeremiah and Isaiah legitimised their prophecies (cf. Isa 18:4, 22:25; Jer 2:9, 16:9; Ezek 11:5, 16:58). By these words, the prophets are claiming to be representatives of Yahweh. However, this is also part of their deception because Yahweh clarifies that he neither spoke to nor sent them (6b, 7c). The prophets only try to give divine weight to their message, perhaps so that it is more acceptable to their audience. However, by doing so, they are using Yahweh’s name in vain (Exod 20:7), for which they would not be held guiltless, and they trample the Mosaic law that forbade speaking presumptuously (Deut 18:20– 22).⁴³

Finally, they are deluded because they יָחַל (hope) for the confirmation (by way of fulfilment) of their false prophecies (v. 6c). The verb יָחַל in its *piel* form oftentimes, as is in this case, expresses a hopeful waiting or longing, for example waiting on God to act or for the fulfilment of his word (Job 6:11; Ps 31:24; 33:18; 69:3; 119:49; Isa 42:4).⁴⁴ The prophets hopefully long for their words to be fulfilled. The verb קָם is standard in Biblical Hebrew to express the effecting of an oath, covenant or vow. The hope is that Yahweh (the possible

⁴² Jerry Shepherd, “שוֹא,” in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis. Vol. 4: Š - t*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren, 9. print, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 2009), 53.

⁴³ Ronald M. Hals, *Ezekiel, The Forms of the Old Testament Literature*, v. 19 (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 1989), 87.

⁴⁴ Ludwig Köhler et al., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* א - ע, Study ed (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2001), 407; David J. A. Clines, ed., *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* א - ז, vol. IV (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 201.



subject of the infinitive) will fulfil their prophecies since they speak in his name.⁴⁵ Ezekiel exposes the prophets' delusion that attaching Yahweh's name to their own false words would magically allow it to be fulfilled.⁴⁶

Breaches and Coated Walls (vv. 4-5; 10b, 11--15)

The wall around Jerusalem was breached, and the city was destroyed by Babylon (2 Kgs 25:3-26) in the eleventh year of Ezekiel's exile (also the eleventh year of Zedekiah's reign). However, he received the report in the twelfth year through a man who had escaped (Ezek 33:21). In vv. 4-5, 10b and 11-15, Ezekiel is speaking about the situation back in Jerusalem before this destruction took place, at least between 593 BC when he started ministering and 586 BC when the destruction occurred. He accuses the prophets of being like foxes among ruins (v. 4), not repairing breaches in the walls of Jerusalem so that it is strong in battle (v. 5) but covering the walls with whitewash (v. 10b). Because of the conduct of the prophets, Yahweh will tear down the wall with violent wind and hailstones and the said prophets will also be destroyed in the process (vv. 11-15).

The prophet's comparison to foxes (שׁוּעָלִים; v. 4) depicts them negatively. Foxes are portrayed in the Bible as destructive, cunning and scavengers in ruins (Song 2:15; Matt 7:15; Acts 20:29; Luke 13:32; Lam 5:18). The most significant comparison to foxes in this verse relates to ruins בְּהָרָבוֹת קְשָׁעִלִים 'foxes among ruins.' While Judah was in ruins because it had deteriorated spiritually into a state of sinfulness that deserved judgment (Ezek 22), the prophets were preying on it.⁴⁷ As foxes find a comfortable habitation in ruins, the prophets find a natural comfort and means of living in the desolate state of Israel.⁴⁸ This metaphor implies that they profited from the sinful state of Israel and made it worse.⁴⁹

The mention of the breaches and walls that need repair (Ezek 13:5) is figurative since the walls of Jerusalem were still intact at this point. Repairing literal breaches belonged to soldiers who would determine the danger threatening the city and labour to reinforce its walls.⁵⁰ Moreover, Yahweh's pardon for the nation of Israel was based on repentance (2

⁴⁵ ESV and NIV link the fulfillment directly to Yahweh, hence the translation, 'yet they expect him to fulfill their word.'

⁴⁶ Block, *The Book of Ezekiel, Chapters 1--24*, 402.

⁴⁷ Charles Lee Feinberg, *The Prophecy of Ezekiel; the Glory of the Lord* (Chicago: Moody press, 1969), 73.

⁴⁸ Craigie, *Ezekiel*, 90; Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 163.

⁴⁹ Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 236; Duguid, *Ezekiel*, 172; Leale, "Ezekiel XII-XXIX," 139.

⁵⁰ Wevers, *Ezekiel*, 164; Wevers, 86.



Chron 7:14) and not on repairing the physical wall. By referring to prophets for this role, the text refers to the highly significant spiritual role of the prophets. The walls symbolised the ‘moral and spiritual defence of the people.’⁵¹ The prophet’s role was to warn the people concerning their iniquity by proclaiming the truth⁵² that would produce repentance (i.e., “build a wall”) and to plead Yahweh’s mercies on their behalf (stand in the breaches)⁵³ (cf. Isa 30:13).

The symbolism of the walls and breaches is clarified in Ezek 22:30⁵⁴;

Ezek 13:5 You have not gone into the breaches or repaired the wall over the house of Israel, to stand in battle in the Day of the Lord.

Ezek 22:30 I searched from among them a man to build the wall and to stand in the breach before me on behalf of the land so that I do not destroy it, but I found none.

לֹא עָלִיתֶם בְּפְרָצוֹת וַתִּגְדְּרוּ גֵדֵר עַל-בֵּית
יִשְׂרָאֵל לַעֲמֹד בַּמִּלְחָמָה בְּיוֹם יְהוָה:

וְאֶבְקֶשׁ מֵהֶם אִישׁ גִּדְר־גֵּדֵר וְעֹמֵד בַּפֶּרֶץ לִפְנֵי בְעָד
הָאָרֶץ לְבַלְתִּי שַׁחֲתָהּ וְלֹא מָצָאתִי:

Ezekiel 22 records Jerusalem’s sins and coming judgment. Jerusalem is accused of idolatry, oppression, bloodshed, bribery and extortion, among other sins (vv. 3–4, 6–12). The symbolism of a man building the wall and standing in the breaches (22:30) is closely associated with a person interceding for the nation’s pardon before Yahweh. The broken walls and breaches indicate the city’s vulnerability to judgment because of its sinfulness. The use of this same imagery in Ezek 13:5 suggests that the prophets were not seeking God in repentance on behalf of sinful Israel (as Moses interceded for the Israelites when they made a golden calf and worshipped it, and Yahweh relented from destroying them in Exod 32:11–14; cf Psalm 106:23; Ezek 9:8; 11:13; Jer 27:18).

Similarly, the imagery of תָּפַל (whitewash or mud plaster)⁵⁵ in Ezekiel 22:28 states that the prophets whitewash the sinful deeds of the people by false visions and deceptive

⁵¹ Feinberg, *The Prophecy of Ezekiel; the Glory of the Lord*, 74.

⁵² A Joseph Everson, “Days of Yahweh,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 93, no. 3 (September 1974): 333.

⁵³ Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1--20*, 236; Cooper, *Ezekiel*, 154.

⁵⁴ Also employed in Isa 58:12.

⁵⁵ See William Henry Propp, “The Meaning of Tāpel in Ezekiel,” *Zeitschrift Für Die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 102, no. 3 (1990): 404–7; William C. Williams, “תָּפַל,” in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*, ed. Willem VanGemeren (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 1997), 324; Graz Marbock, “תָּפַל,” in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. Gerhard Johannes Botterweck et al. (Grand Rapids (Mich.): W. B. Eerdmans, 2006), 743–44. Some (e.g. Rashi) derive the noun from a root meaning



divinations. The sense of תָּכַל here in Ezek 22:28 is the same as that in Ezek 13:10b. When whitewash or plaster is applied to a wall, it does not do away with the stain but only covers its defects and makes it appear attractive and strong.⁵⁶ The prophets, through offering false prophesies and divinations, misled Israel by covering (not exposing) its sins and by flattering them, thereby making their state appear less grievous (cf. Lam 2:14).⁵⁷ Blenkinsopp describes it as ‘the creation of an illusory and specious appearance of truth designed to conceal fundamental inauthenticity’ (cf. Job 13:4).⁵⁸ Furthermore, when anyone attempts to build even a חֲרִיץ⁵⁹ (a flimsy wall),⁶⁰ they cover it with whitewash (Ezek 13:10b). This could mean two things. The prophets may have frustrated efforts of repentance by the people by voicing their prophesies to override the attempts of repentance. Alternatively, the flimsy walls may symbolise the rebellion and misguided hopes that the people themselves create,⁶¹ which the prophets endorse by making them appear authentic.⁶² The latter meaning is more probable, given the overall sinful state of Israel at the time. Hence, spiritual desolation is a combined effort of the people and the prophets.

At the start of v. 8, לָכֵן ‘therefore’ introduces the consequences for the ills committed by the prophets. Because of its sinfulness, Jerusalem was weak. It would not stand God’s judgment (vv. 5b). Yahweh will cast out the false prophets from the council and the registry in Israel (v. 9)⁶³ and destroy them (v. 14b). They would no longer be among Yahweh’s covenant people. The strong imagery of violent wind, rain and hailstones⁶⁴ tearing down the whitewashed walls, with the strong element of Yahweh’s anger (vv. 11, 13), symbolises

‘untempered’ which would mean poor quality mortar which does not hold a wall together. Others relate it with plaster or whitewash, which when applied only makes a weak wall look good.

⁵⁶ Peter Naylor, *A Study Commentary on Ezekiel*, An EP Study Commentary (England: EP Books, 2011), 186.

⁵⁷ Johannes Lindblom, *Prophecy in Ancient Israel*, 9. print (Philadelphia: Fortress Pr, 1980), 212; Feinberg, *The Prophecy of Ezekiel; the Glory of the Lord*, 75.

⁵⁸ Blenkinsopp, *Ezekiel*, 70.

⁵⁹ This word is a *hapax*, translated as ‘party wall’ or ‘flimsy wall’ (NIV, 2011). It is different from חֲרִיץ which is what is expected of the prophets to build.

⁶⁰ See Naylor, *A Study Commentary on Ezekiel*, 186. The word may also mean a partition or a screen.

⁶¹ See Tuell, *Ezekiel*, 73. He suggests that the referents here could be the people trusting in Jerusalem’s walls and declaring their superiority over the exiles outside or casting doubt on Ezekiel’s words (11:1–12; 12:21–28).

⁶² Feinberg, *The Prophecy of Ezekiel; the Glory of the Lord*, 75; Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1--20*, 244; Taylor, *Ezekiel*, 122; Tuell, *Ezekiel*, 73.

⁶³ See Ralph Alexander, *Ezekiel* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1976), 47. This means the prophets would be excluded from the register of Israelites such as are found in Neh 7 and Ezra 2, hence excommunicated from Israel.

⁶⁴ Patrick Fairbairn, *Commentary on Ezekiel* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Kregel Publications, 1989), 145. Hailstones were uncommon in that part of the ANE, and they were used as the most severe expression of Yahweh’s judgment upon his enemies (Job 38:22; Ps 18:12, 13).



exposing and shaming the false prophets through a great disaster, and this certainly was the destruction of Jerusalem by Babylon in 586 BC. Furthermore, this is referred to as ‘The Day of the Lord’ (13:5), which is how Ezekiel referred to Jerusalem’s oncoming judgment and destruction.⁶⁵ The false prophets’ words were proved wrong as they were not fulfilled.

The purpose of their judgment is so that Yahweh is known יְהוָה יֵדְעוּם כִּי־אֲנִי יְהוָה (and you shall know that I am Yahweh; vv. 9, 14); a key phrase within Ezekiel’s oracles, repeated in various forms over seventy times in the book. The knowledge of Yahweh is stated as the purpose of judgment upon Israel (6:7, 13; 7:4, 9; 13:9, 14), judgment upon non-Israelites (17:21; 35:9), and restoration of Israel (20:42; 36:11; 37:6, 13, 14). Evans summarises the rhetorical and theological function of the formula as a mark of the prophet’s key concern that Yahweh is known; the book’s unifying factor; a reinforcement of the theocentricity of the book, and highlighting of Yahweh’s engagement in the life of Israel and the nations.⁶⁶ The phrase underlies the book’s message that Yahweh’s actions of judgment or restoration prove his character and historical engagement in the affairs of the nations and glorify his name.⁶⁷

This subsection employs the metaphors of breaches, coated walls, foxes and ruins to describe the nature and conduct of the prophets amidst Israel’s political and spiritual crisis. Instead of addressing the nation’s brokenness by mediating for repentance, they make the situation appear less grievous by proclaiming peace and even profiting from the venture. Therefore, the prophets are judged so that Yahweh reveals his true self to the nation.

Misleading Utterances of Peace (vv. 10a, 16)

The adverb יָעַן which signals a strong and sharp causal nuance⁶⁸ starts in verse 10. The adverb is used doubly in the idiom יָעַן וַיִּבְרָאֵן for emphasis (cf. 36:3; Lev 26:43).⁶⁹ It provides the grounds for God’s hand being against the lying prophets (v. 9), while v. 16 states the objects of God’s wrath (those who will be destroyed alongside the wall for whitewashing it: v. 15). The statements offer the overall charges for the judgments, which were not explicitly

⁶⁵ Everson, “Days of Yahweh,” 333; Taylor, *Ezekiel*, 121.

⁶⁶ John F. Evans, *You Shall Know That I Am Yahweh: An Inner-Biblical Interpretation of Ezekiel’s Recognition Formula*, Bulletin for Biblical Research Supplement (University Park, Pennsylvania: Eisenbrauns, 2019), 245.

⁶⁷ Carley, *Ezekiel among the Prophets*, 40; John F. Evans, *You Shall Know That I Am Yahweh: An Inner-Biblical Interpretation of Ezekiel’s Recognition Formula*, Bulletin for Biblical Research Supplement (University Park, Pennsylvania: Eisenbrauns, 2019), 1.

⁶⁸ Joüon and Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 599.

⁶⁹ Block, *The Book of Ezekiel, Chapters 1--24*, 397.



captured earlier. They report the actual deceptions, the summarised content of their messages, which are utterances of שָׁלוֹם וְאֵין שָׁלוֹם (peace when there was no peace).

10 Definitely because they have led my people
astray, saying ‘peace’ when there’s no peace’

¹⁰ יָעַן וּבִיָּעַן הִטְעוּ אֶת-עַמִּי לֵאמֹר שָׁלוֹם וְאֵין
שָׁלוֹם

16 prophets of Israel who prophesy to
Jerusalem seeing visions of peace for her
when there is no peace,’ declares the Lord
Yahweh.

¹⁶ נְבִיאֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הַנִּבְּאִים אֶל-יְרוּשָׁלַם וְהַחֲזִים
לָהּ חֲזֹן שָׁלוֹם וְאֵין שָׁלוֹם נֹאֵם אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה: פ

In verse 10, the false prophets are accused of הִטְעוּ אֶת-עַמִּי (leading Yahweh’s people astray). This brings to mind a picture of a shepherd who, instead of leading the sheep to a good pasture, causes them to get lost.⁷⁰ The verb טעה appears only once in the Hebrew text bearing the same meaning as the commonly used verb תעה (cf Ezek 14:11; Jer 50:6). HALOT suggests that תעה is a variant spelling of טעה.⁷¹ In its *hiphil* form in this verse, תעה/טעה has the sense of people diverting from the right path because of the influence, behaviour or wrong guidelines of those leading them (cf. Mic 3:5; Jer 50:6; 2 Chron 33:9; Jer 23:32). The influence of those with authority (whether kings, princes, prophets, guides; cf. Isa 3:12; Jer 23:13; 50:6) results in straying of the people whether or not it is intentionally or knowingly planned. Because of the deceptive utterances of the prophets, the people of Judah were departing into sinfulness from the right path of the law of Yahweh.

The prophets declared שָׁלוֹם for the people (v. 10a, 16). The meaning of שָׁלוֹם is expansive in the Biblical Hebrew language and culture. It encompassed health, harmony in relationships, absence of war, covenant-keeping, justice in communal relationships, inner peace, and material prosperity.⁷² This wholeness is expressed by Ezekiel when he speaks of the covenant of peace that Yahweh would make with his people (Ezek 34:25–29a). Some

⁷⁰ Block, 408.

⁷¹ Ludwig Köhler et al., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* ת-פ, Study ed (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2001), 1766.

⁷² Erland Waltner, “Shalom and Wholeness,” *Brethren Life and Thought* 29, no. 3 (1984): 147; Jacques B. Doukhan, “Shalom: The Hebrew View of Peace,” *Shabbat Shalom* 55, no. 3 (December 2008): 43; Richard D Weis, “The Hebrew Bible Has a Word for ‘Welfare,’” *Church & Society* 88, no. 4 (March 1998): 143; Paul D Hanson, “War and Peace in the Hebrew Bible,” *Interpretation* 38, no. 4 (October 1984): 347; Douglas James Harris, *Shalom! The Biblical Concept of Peace* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1970), 16–24; Walter Brueggemann, *Living toward a Vision: Biblical Reflections on Shalom*, 2nd ed, Shalom Resource (New York: United Church Press, 1982), 16; Phillip J. Nel, “שָׁלוֹם,” in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*, ed. Willem VanGemeren (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 1997), 130.



years before the destruction of 586 BC, Jerusalem experienced a lot of chaos because of their sins, such as invasion, plague and hunger.⁷³ The people were not living in the totality of wholeness. At this point, Babylon was overseeing the affairs of Judah. Babylon had already carried away Jerusalem's ruling class and top citizens, and Zedekiah was instituted as the king of Judah (2 Kgs 24:10-20).

In this text, the שָׁלוֹם which the prophets proclaimed has the sense of a state devoid of war, threats, terror or conflict (cf. Jer 14:13; Ezek 7:25; Zech 9:10).⁷⁴ First, the prophets were assuring the people of political peace,⁷⁵ that they are (or will be) free from the terror of other nations, particularly Babylon which was ravaging the ANE and had already carried off their elite. Jeremiah 27-28 speaks of the same class of prophets in Jerusalem after the first deportation (the same period as Ezekiel), who assured the people of restoration. The book of Jeremiah makes it clear that proclamations of שָׁלוֹם just before the 586 BC destruction of Judah had everything to do with the threat of Nebuchadnezzar.⁷⁶ However, this promise of peace was false since Zedekiah did evil before Yahweh, who then decided to cast Israel away from His presence (2 Kgs 24:20a). Babylon, after that, attacked and destroyed Jerusalem and tore down the city walls (2 Kgs 24:8-21).

Secondly, and most importantly, this prophecy implies that Judah was at peace with Yahweh and, therefore, free from his terror. The covenant community enjoyed Yahweh's promise of protection from invasions. However, these prophets did not consider that this protection was pegged only in their covenant-keeping (Deut 28:7) and not in disobedience (Deut 28:25). True prophets prophesied, based on the Mosaic law, that peace was a result of righteous living and justice,⁷⁷ and could not be achieved in sinfulness (cf. Isa 32:17; 48:18; 54:13; 60:17). The prophecy of peace in Ezek 13:10, 16 was made at a time of sinfulness and moral corruption (Ezek 22). According to Ezekiel, it was not true that the people of Judah

⁷³ Hanson, "War and Peace in the Hebrew Bible," 355.

⁷⁴ Brownlee, *Ezekiel 1-19*, 190; Mainz Stendebach, "שָׁלוֹם," in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. Gerhard Johannes Botterweck et al. (Grand Rapids (Mich.): W. B. Eerdmans, 2006), 18-19. Stendebach writes that this sense of שָׁלוֹם (a state devoid of war or strife) is a secondary development from the original meaning of 'completeness' and 'wholeness.' He affirms that the sense meant in Ezekiel 13 is that of freedom from the threat of enemies (political and military stability).

⁷⁵ Nel, "שָׁלוֹם," 132.

⁷⁶ Zimmerli, *Ezekiel I*, 295.

⁷⁷ Doukhan, "Shalom," 43.



were free from Yahweh’s terror—there was no peace. The prophets only gave them false security, leading them astray to imagine repentance was unnecessary.⁷⁸

Theological Reflection

True prophets such as Ezekiel and Jeremiah exposed the sinfulness of Israel at the time of exile and warned of the impending judgment (Jer 2—11; Ezek 5—24). Unfortunately, a different set of prophets, as described in Ezek 13:1–16, did the exact opposite. The ‘prophets of Israel’ in Ezek 13:1–16 are outrightly identified as false prophets by their words and conduct.

The false prophets contributed to the nation’s sinfulness through their false prophecies of peace. Their prophecies originated from their desires and inclinations, aligning with their foolish nature. They had not received any revelation from Yahweh; all they spoke were hollow deceptions. Their judgments of the times of Israel were not based on the law of Yahweh. They proclaimed a message of peace, which would understandably calm the people in their political turmoil. However, this message misguided the people as it also calmed them in their sinfulness, to imagine that Yahweh’s stamp of favour was upon them in their corrupt condition. As Isaiah puts it, “If favor is shown to the wicked, he does not learn righteousness; in the land of uprightness he works evil and does not behold the majesty of the LORD” (26:10). A sinful Israel, without rebuke and flattered with revelations of peace, would persist in the corrupt status quo and even get worse.

The prophets neglected their duty to enforce the covenant and mediate between the people and Yahweh. According to the Torah, breaking the covenant would lead to devastating consequences, including being pursued and conquered by their enemies (Deut 28:25). This was exactly happening to Israel, as Babylon pursued and conquered them. A true prophet would interpret the times by expositing the Law for the people so that they understand the reason for their plight and, accordingly, repent of their sins and turn back to keeping the covenant. Only then would the nation be free from Yahweh’s wrath. Additionally, the prophet would plead for mercy before Yahweh so that he, in his wisdom, would spare the nation and direct it into righteousness. The prophets in Ezek 13 did not perform these roles as expected.

⁷⁸ Duguid, *Ezekiel*, 172.



An additional error of the prophets was their involvement in the forbidden practice of divination. First, this would be for the profit they acquired through receiving the divination fee. Ezekiel 13:3 further describes them as foxes among ruins, which implies that they found a natural and comfortable habitation in the spiritual desolation of Jerusalem. The ruins gave them an opportunity for prophecy, which would be their means of living and cause for their popularity in the season. Second, perhaps, in the desperation of their lack of revelation from Yahweh, they engaged in divination to have something ‘spiritual’ to tell the people. Even this practice did not yield revelation for them.

The strong language of exclusion and destruction (rain, wind and hailstones; Ezek 13:8–16) expresses the severity of the prophets’ judgment and depicts how offensive and distasteful false prophecy is to Yahweh. Yahweh would cut off these false prophets from the covenant community, expose their falsity, and destroy them. The people, who promoted sinfulness with the prophets, also suffered the consequences of this judgment, as Babylon destroyed Jerusalem and exiled the Israelites.

The reflections above bear on the proclamation of false prosperity in the church today as the character of false prophets is considered. First, a true representation of Yahweh demands that his word is faithfully proclaimed by following the proper hermeneutical practices. In the church today, there are temptations to please the crowds, to meet the crowd’s wants, and to express one’s own opinions or wishes against the word of God. The prophets of Israel, ministering in a crisis, fell into the trap of proclaiming wellbeing to God’s people at a pivotal moment of Israel’s sinfulness against the covenant prescription, which only brought them into judgment. This faithfulness is also related to the source of proclamations. The prophets engaged in divination, perhaps in the desperation of not receiving a word from Yahweh. This factor is important since it shows that false prophets may preach mysterious ungodly revelations, which sound captivating and highly spiritual, yet have no biblical basis. Some may even use ungodly practices such as witchcraft to receive some form of revelation or to lure people into following them. Second, the calling of God demands a genuine concern for the spiritual condition of the people and continually leading the flock to be devoted to God, which is opposed to the ministry for selfish gain. It is common to hear of contemporary churches that exist for business. The business is carried out through exploitation of the congregants, often taking advantage of their life crises such as sickness or poverty. The



leaders of these churches promise them wellbeing in the name of God while asking them to sacrifice their last cents. Many believers have become discouraged in the faith or sinking further into sin and disbelief because of this exploitative shepherding.

Conclusion

Ezekiel prophesies concerning Jerusalem and its prophets during a vulnerable season in Israel's life. There was a spiritual malfunction since Israel and its kings had neglected the law of Yahweh and engrossed themselves in the sinful practices of the neighbouring nations. As a result of sin, there was terror, fear and hopelessness because of the Babylonian invasion and destabilisation of their political and social fibre. The wrath of God was hanging over Israel. Peace with Him was crucial since only Yahweh would divert such a disaster. The prophets would be the ideal agents to provide guidance and direction through the Mosaic Covenant and to seek Yahweh's pardon so that the nation repents and Yahweh's wrath is lifted. Unfortunately, the prophets worsened the situation by proclaiming peace to the people, numbing their repentance and making their sinfulness seem less grievous. They misrepresented Yahweh by declaring their own opinions and meddling with foreign spiritual practices. For this reason, Yahweh pronounces their utter destruction and exclusion from the covenant community, displaying the severity of false proclamations of prosperity. The ministry of the prophets in Ezek 13:1–16 exposes and reminisces selfish, exploitative and mystic ministry in the church today and is worth a reflection by believers so that the phenomenon of false prosperity preaching is curbed for the preservation of faithful ministry.

Bibliography

- Alexander, Ralph. *Ezekiel*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1976.
- Arnold, Bill T., and John H. Choi. *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
- Blenkinsopp, Joseph. *Ezekiel*. Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching. Louisville, Ky: J. Knox Press, 1990.
- Block, Daniel I. *The Book of Ezekiel, Chapters 1-24*. New International Commentary on the Old Testament. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997.



- Brownlee, William Hugh. *Ezekiel 1-19*. Word Biblical Commentary 28. Waco, Tex: Word Books, 1986.
- Brueggemann, Walter. *Living toward a Vision: Biblical Reflections on Shalom*. 2nd ed. Shalom Resource. New York: United Church Press, 1982.
- Carley, Keith W. *Ezekiel among the Prophets: A Study of Ezekiel's Place in Prophetic Tradition*. Studies in Biblical Theology: Second Series No 31. London: SCM Press, 1975.
- Clines, David J. A., ed. *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* ך - ך. Vol. IV. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993.
- , ed. *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* ך — ך. Vol. V. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993.
- Cooper, Lamar Eugene. *Ezekiel*. New American Commentary. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994.
- Craigie, Peter C. *Ezekiel*. Daily Study Bible--Old Testament. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983.
- Davidson, A. B. "The Book of the Prophet Ezekiel." In *Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges, 1892.
- Davidson, A. B., and A. W. Streane. *Ezekiel*. Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1916. <https://www.amazon.com/Cambridge-Bible-Schools-Colleges-Ezekiel/dp/B00F9JD5OA>.
- Doukhan, Jacques B. "Shalom: The Hebrew View of Peace." *Shabbat Shalom* 55, no. 3 (December 2008): 42-45.
- Driver, Samuel R. *Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament*. New York: Scribner's, 1913.
- Duguid, Iain M. *Ezekiel*. NIV Application Commentary. Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 1999.
- Eichrodt, Walther. *Ezekiel*. Old Testament Library. Richmond: Westminster John Knox Press, 1970.
- Evans, John F. *You Shall Know That I Am Yahweh: An Inner-Biblical Interpretation of Ezekiel's Recognition Formula*. Bulletin for Biblical Research Supplement. University Park, Pennsylvania: Eisenbrauns, 2019.
- Everson, A Joseph. "Days of Yahweh." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 93, no. 3 (September 1974): 329-37.
- Ewald, Heinrich. "Die Propheten Des Alten Bundes Erklart." In *Jeremja Und Hezeqiel*, Vol. 2. Gottingen, 1868.
- Fairbairn, Patrick. *Commentary on Ezekiel*. Grand Rapids, Mich: Kregel Publications, 1989.
- Feinberg, Charles Lee. *The Prophecy of Ezekiel; the Glory of the Lord*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1969.
- Gray, George Buchanan. *A Critical Introduction to the Old Testament*. University of Michigan Library, 1913.



- Greenberg, Moshe, ed. *Ezekiel 1-20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. 1st ed. The Anchor Bible, v. 22. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983.
- Hals, Ronald M. *Ezekiel*. The Forms of the Old Testament Literature, v. 19. Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 1989.
- Hanson, Paul D. "War and Peace in the Hebrew Bible." *Interpretation* 38, no. 4 (October 1984): 341-62.
- Harris, Douglas James. *Shalom! The Biblical Concept of Peace*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1970.
- Horsnell, Malcolm J. A. "קָסַם." In *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*, edited by Willem VanGemeren, 3:945-51. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997.
- Ironside, H. A. *Expository Notes on Ezekiel, the Prophet*. 1st ed. New York: Loizeaux Bros, 1949.
- Josephus, Flavius. *The Antiquities of the Jews*. Vol. Book 8, n.d.
- Joüon, Paul, and T. Muraoka. *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*. Subsidia Biblica, 14/1-14/2. Roma: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblio, 1991.
- Köhler, Ludwig, Walter Baumgartner, M. E. J. Richardson, Johann Jakob Stamm, and Benedikt Hartmann. *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament א - ז*. Study ed. Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2001.
- . *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament ז - א*. Study ed. Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2001.
- Leale, Thomas H. "Ezekiel XII-XXIX." In *The Preacher's Complete Homiletic Commentary on the Books of the Bible with Critical and Explanatory Notes, Indexes, Etc., by Various Authors*. J. New York, NY: Funk & Wagnalls, 2011.
- Limburg, James. *Hosea-Micah*. Interpretation. Richmond: Westminster John Knox Press, 1988.
- Lindblom, Johannes. *Prophecy in Ancient Israel*. 9. print. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980.
- Marbock, Graz. "תָּפַל." In *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, edited by Gerhard Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, Heinz-Josef Fabry, and David E. Green, 740-44. Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 2006.
- Matthews, I. G. "Ezekiel." In *An American Commentary on the OT*. Philadelphia: The American Baptist Publication Society, 1939.
- Mein, A. *Ezekiel and the Ethics of Exile*. OTM, Oxford: Oxford University Press, n.d.
- Naylor, Peter. *A Study Commentary on Ezekiel*. An EP Study Commentary. England: EP Books, 2011.
- Nel, Phillip J. "שָׁלוֹם." In *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*, edited by Willem VanGemeren, 130-35. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997.
- Noth, Martin. *The History of Israel*. Translated by Stanley Godman. New York: Harper and Row, 1960.
- Propp, William Henry. "The Meaning of Tāpel in Ezekiel." *Zeitschrift Für Die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 102, no. 3 (1990): 404-8.



- Shepherd, Jerry. “שׁוֹא.” In *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis. Vol. 4: Š - t*, edited by Willem A. VanGemeren, 9. print. Vol. 4. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009.
- Simundson, Daniel J. *Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah*. Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005.
- Smend, Rudolf. *Der Prophet Ezechiel*. Leipzig: KeH, 18800.
- Stendebach, Mainz. “שָׁלֵם.” In *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, edited by Gerhard Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, Heinz-Josef Fabry, and David E. Green, 13–49. Grand Rapids, Mich.: W. B. Eerdmans, 2006.
- Taylor, John B. *Ezekiel: An Introduction and Commentary*. The Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. London: Tyndale, 1969.
- Tiemeyer, Lena-Sofia. “Ezekiel, Book Of.” In *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Prophets*, edited by Mark J. Boda and J. G. McConville, 214–29. Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Academic, 2012.
- Tuell, Steven Shawn. *Ezekiel*. Old Testament Series New International Biblical Commentary. Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 2009.
- Waltner, Erland. “Shalom and Wholeness.” *Brethren Life and Thought* 29, no. 3 (1984): 145–51.
- Weis, Richard D. “The Hebrew Bible Has a Word for ‘Welfare.’” *Church & Society* 88, no. 4 (March 1998): 142–46.
- Wevers, John William. *Ezekiel*. New Century Bible Commentary. Grand Rapids : London: Eerdmans ; Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1982.
- Williams, William C. “תָּפַל.” In *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*, edited by Willem VanGemeren, 324–25. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997.
- Zimmerli, Walther. *Ezekiel I: Chapters 1--24*. Hermeneia. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1979.
- Zimmerli, Walther, Frank Moore Cross, and Klaus Baltzer. *Ezekiel: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel*. Hermeneia, Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979.

