

# Woe to the Foolish Prophets

by Brian Gochenour

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*The sermon warns against the dangers of false prophets and false teachers, who preach a message that is comfortable and appealing, but not necessarily true, and encourages the church to know what God's word sounds like and obey it.*

**Duration:** 34:48

**Scripture:** Jeremiah 23:28, Ezekiel 13:4-5, John 3:16

**Topics:** "Foolish Prophets"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of the Bible as the final authority for the church. They criticize those who try to undermine the word of God and promote a false concept of spirituality without relying on scripture. The speaker encourages the audience to contemplate and seek understanding beyond what can be seen and measured in the physical world. They also highlight the difference between being encouraged to continue in one's own ways versus being encouraged to align with God's desires, even if it means changing who we are. The sermon references Jeremiah's message of God's words being like fire that devours, indicating the spiritual battle believers face. The speaker also mentions the fall of sister congregations and the need to prioritize the revelation of God in discussions and teachings, rather than getting caught up in debates over secondary matters. The sermon concludes by warning against false teachers who fail to fulfill their duty to preach and prepare the people for the battle of the Lord.

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## Transcript

Woe to the foolish prophets, Ezekiel chapter 13, verses 1 through 8. Roughly 600 years before Christ was born, Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre, Sidon, Jeremiah chapter 27, verse 3, desired to revolt against Babylon, the great world power of their day. No longer desiring to be just tributaries, Israel right alongside them desired to revolt. These plans being made and being put forward, Babylon responded quickly.

And in the year 588, they come in January and camp their forces out in a siege against the city Jerusalem. Certainly, this brought fear into the inhabitants of the land and to Jerusalem, but they did not conquer the city all at once. They took time.

In fact, by summer, there was hope that Egypt was going to help out, but that hope was really that hope was quickly put down as Egypt was not a foe that could contend with Babylon. But as they camped out in front of Jerusalem, not directly going up against the city, they went about the area of Judea. Along the

territory of Judea, they conquered city after city.

Prior to going into Jerusalem, it was made certain that any capability of making a stand was demolished. Jeremiah, chapter thirty four, verse six through seven, describes this. Then Jeremiah spoke these words, the king of Judah and Jerusalem.

When the king of Babylon's army fought against Jerusalem and all the cities of Judah that were left against Lakish and Azekah, for only these fortified cities remained in all of Judah. So here, Jeremiah says, there are now just two fortified cities remaining, just two. Nebuchadnezzar, his army has gone around all the land and has wiped us out.

He has defeated us. We have been destroyed. Two cities left.

You know, it's interesting, as you contemplate those two cities that Jeremiah brings up, Lakish, Azekah, that because of history, because of archaeologists, we've been able to discover one of those cities, Lakish. It's interesting that in discovering this city, they've also discovered ostraca that represent little writings that represent the last correspondence that took place between the watchman at the wall and the lord of the city. Confirming the biblical account precisely as we would recognize would be the case.

But in this correspondence, we have the picture of what it was like for one of the last surviving cities to look out on the horizon and see God's people, Israel, one by one fall. I imagine or try to imagine what it would be like to be at the wall of Lakish and to look out and to see the enemy advancing everywhere without any struggle whatsoever, conquering, putting a blaze time and time again. What would that be like? We're studying the remnant.

I say we better get accustomed to that feeling. No, we don't look out on the horizon and see physical armies going about destroying. But our battle is a spiritual battle.

And how often have we in the congregation where we worship looked out on the horizon to see sister congregation after sister congregation fall as though the enemy is having no trouble whatsoever. This watchman wrote to his lord. And in every message he sent to his lord, he said, Yahweh, be with you, Jehovah, be with you.

Well, those who have studied the Old Testament, we know that they were as far from Jehovah as could be. The watchman also longed for the peace of the lord of that city, longed for the peace of Jerusalem as well. But he writes one ostraca, he writes one statement corresponding to what we are saying, he's saying, Lord, I want things to go well, but I've seen the signifiers of Aztec and it doesn't look good.

It doesn't look good. The city's a blaze. Now we're waiting to hear word from Jerusalem.

Yes, we have felt that we have felt that how did it get there? I'd say whenever we answer how God's people in the Old Testament came to where they were in that moment, we will get insight into why the church of today is heading the same direction, why we are experiencing the same problems, why sister congregation after congregation is falling flat to the enemy. Jeremiah gives the answer. A contemporary of Ezekiel, he says in Jeremiah, chapter five, verses 30 to 31, a wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land.

The prophets prophesied falsely and the priest bear rule by their means, and my people love to have it so. There's the problem. That's what led to the destruction we read about that took place at the hand of

Babylon.

If we wanted to make a twofold sermon, which we will this afternoon, we could put that sermon into the prophecies, the prophets, the prophets prophesied falsely. Number one. And the people love to have it so.

That's what happened and that is what is happening today, and I appreciate the turning on of the fans. What I'm five minutes into this and I'm so not a year goes by that mentions not made. But I'd say today as Christians, let's not concern ourselves with prophets that seems too foreign and rightly so.

Let's put in its place the term preachers. The preachers preach falsehood and God's people love to have it so. God's people love to have it so, isn't that what Paul said would happen in 2nd Timothy, chapter four, verse three, for the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but after their own lust, shall they keep themselves teachers having itching ears? So let's consider this.

The preachers preach falsehood, and if you would turn to Ezekiel, chapter 13, beginning in verse one, and let's ask the question, how do false preachers work? How do false teachers work? That might help us to spot them, but it also show us some of their motivations, what they're about, what they're doing and why that's so damaging. First off, as you look to verse one. And the word of the Lord came unto me saying, son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel that prophesy and saying to them that prophesy.

It's made clear in these first two verses, as you ask yourself, what is a false preacher about doing? What is a false prophet about doing? The first thing they're about doing is failing to acknowledge the authority of God's word. Here is a group of people that are prophesying that are prophets that prophesy emphatic. These people are about preaching, but guess what? They are not preaching.

They're not preaching God's word as you go on to read. And that's why as you look into verse one and the word of the Lord came unto me saying, that's why it's so clear that we make certain that the man who gets up to speak can truly say this is what the word of God is saying. This is what the word of God is saying.

Today, as we look out at the conflict about us, how much does this following quote seem to characterize it? Nevertheless, it must also be stressed that the final authority of the church is not the Bible. But the Lord, in doing that, they have impugned the word of God and they've tried to paint a picture that we can have a knowledge of this spiritual realm without God's word, which is a false concept. Have you ever tried to contemplate about something that you cannot look at with your eyes in this world, that you cannot measure, that you cannot read, that you cannot explain by looking at this universe? Have you ever tried to contemplate something beyond that? It's impossible without divine revelation.

We will know nothing of that world of which we are heading and of which we preach. You know, it's interesting as you look about the religious world and even among the church, how much does this characterize so many struggles that take place? Because God's word is not a focus of the debate. You know, in antiquity, people would spend their lives, many spent their entire lives debating such issues as what would happen when you reached the edge of the world.

And who or what lives on the underbelly of the world, they would spend their entire lives debating those issues. But, you know, as you look to even inside the church, sometimes issues are debated that have no grounding in God's word. God's word is taken out of the picture.

It's over here not to be discussed. And we've made issues and we've made debates over things that have nothing to do with revelation. If we would look at the revelation of God, it become apparent what it is we

need to discuss and what it is we need to teach.

How many have spent their lives discussing Calvinism? How many debate what forms of worship and how these forms of worship should be practiced even in the church? But then as you look on in chapter 13 of Ezekiel, verses four and five. Oh, Israel, thy prophets are like the foxes in the deserts. You have not gone up into the gaps, neither made up the hedge for the house of Israel to stand in the battle in the day of the Lord.

The next thing that a false teacher, a false preacher will do. Is we'll get up and preach without ever preaching or doing what needs to be done. Here's a city and here's the walls of that city.

There's a breach. And here are these prophets that are going about preaching. Yes, we are going to be fined.

Egypt is going to help us. But when it's asked, where are they to be found there as foxes running around and not just running around, they're doing damage. They are not dealing with what needs to be dealt with.

And so Jeremiah says in Jeremiah, chapter twenty three, verse twenty one and twenty two, I have not sent these prophets yet. They ran. I have not spoken to them yet.

They prophesied. But if they had stood in my council and have caused my people to hear my words, then they should have turned them from their evil way and from the evil of their doings. Here are a group of preachers that are unwilling to address what needs to be addressed.

There's sin in the camp. The heart of Israel is not where it ought to be. They're doing things.

They're serving God's. They're acting in ways they ought not to serve and do. And we're keeping quiet, a false preacher will not preach in sin, yet Ezekiel stands up and says the soul that sinneth it shall die.

In great contrast to that. You know, in contemplating these things, I'm sure examples come up into your minds of those that you've come in contact with that fit these certain descriptions. I know of a place specifically.

Acquainted with one of the members at that several members of that church where they paid a preacher not quite thirty thousand dollars, and this preacher came in and certain things were not right. And this preacher addressing them, not much changed, but after that preacher left, they hired another preacher. Instead of paying this preacher in the neighborhood of thirty thousand dollars, he's getting paid fifty five thousand dollars and a house he had never preached before in his life, and he has no education of any sort.

Just a couple of weeks ago, one of the elders went out and played golf again, and that preacher was not to be found. Those who stand before. God's people, as false preachers, don't expect them to say anything that's going to hurt their place, anything that's going to ruffle feathers, every doctrine will be calculated, every application upon whom it's being applied will be calculated, and God's people will grow less and less spiritual.

That's what happened with Israel. If the preacher will not preach against sin and make us feel bad, if we're sinning, we need to get rid of him. And then the final thing that a false preacher will do, as you look to Ezekiel, chapter 13, verses six through seven, say they have seen vanity and lying divination saying the

Lord sayeth and the Lord hath not sent them and they have made others to hope that they would confirm the word.

Have you not seen a vain vision and have you not spoken a lying divination, whereas you say the Lord sayeth it, albeit I have not spoken. The third thing I thought worthy of bringing up from this passage this afternoon. And as you look to a false preacher, do not expect anything less than quotations from God, quotations from his word and a apparent trust in God.

Do not expect, and I think oftentimes as we look to the religious world, even in the church, if someone is passionately quoting God's word and shows this great love for God, we are apt to believe them. Well, hey, look at that Bible that's being quoted. You know, a false prophet in this time could have used God's word to preach against what Jeremiah was preaching against, and that is the destruction of Jerusalem by Babylon.

All he would have had to have done is go to 2 Samuel, where God promised David that your kingdom, your throne would be eternal, everlasting. That prophet could stand up and say, guess what? God promised in his word, David would always have someone sitting on the throne in Jerusalem. You see, we have nothing to worry about.

Book, chapter, verse, you know, people do that today in the church, a very popular verse to quote Matthew chapter seven. Judge not, lest you be not judged. I've got Scripture for what I'm saying.

No, this is how we should be, we should be tolerant of what is going on because we've got Scripture to support it. How often have we seen this in the denominational world? John 3:16. How often have you known someone that you dearly desire obey the gospel, but they say God so loves the world that whosoever believes in him and that's the end of the story.

Romans chapter 10, whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved. So I've said the sinner's prayer. I've got my one verse and that's all I want.

Get away. False preachers have that. Those in Israel's day, whenever Babylon was coming in, I guarantee they still referenced Yahweh and they still referenced his word.

Yet God says what they are speaking, I've never said, but it's not all the preacher's fault. As you look at that second part of this lesson and as you continue reflecting on Ezekiel chapter 13, look at verse four. Jeremiah has already said, as we've quoted, my people love to have it so.

And as you have this portrayal of false prophets. Ezekiel says, oh, Israel, verse four, oh, Israel, thy prophets, all this damage, all this destruction, all this falsehood that spread throughout the land would have never taken place if Israel had not stood up and said, look at our prophets, that hired preacher who wants nothing more than money. If he still has a job when the people are standing for truth, I guarantee all you're going to hear is a poor rendition of truth.

He's going to give what the people want. The reason why so much damage is being done in the church today is because people are putting before the congregation those who should never stand in the pulpit, those who do not know God's word. And we, as people who come in contact with these types of preachers, we need to ask the question, how can I discern? How can I say, no, this guy is on the wrong path.

Get him out of here. You know, in 1st John, chapter four, verses one through two, we have the foundation for how we should discern, test the spirits, whether they be of God. For many false prophets have gone out into the world, every spirit.

And here's the test. Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God. So how do I know if a preacher is speaking what what is truth and therefore we should keep and we should heed and we should listen? You know, we're never we should never listen in a passive way.

Let's get that. No one has ever had full put my brain at the door whenever I come in rights. But as you look to 1st John, chapter four, verses one through two, this is what this is what John says.

If you want to know whether or not someone is a false teacher, look at what the spirit of God has said. They were dealing with one doctrinal issue, and that was that Jesus or in this verse here dealing with the doctrinal issue, did Jesus come in the flesh? Gnostic ideas. There were those who said no and had various thoughts about it.

But we know that Jesus was man. And John said, if you want to know whether or not a spirit is from God, look at what the Holy Spirit has said and see if it agrees with it. See what see if they agree with him, the Holy Spirit.

That is the test that's going to require effort, thought, mind and study on the part of everybody to compare what is being put forward from the pulpit to what God, his Holy Spirit has said. Look again as we contemplate what Ezekiel, what Jeremiah are up against in the people of Israel in their day, as they both are preparing for the ultimate destruction of the city, as Zechariah, as Ezekiel, rather, chapter 13, is looking forward to the time in the near future when the city would be destroyed. Here are some recommendations.

If Israel had followed these, perhaps they would not come to the end they did, and if the church follows these, the church can remove itself from the path it's heading down. First off, and this is an overall view of what we've discussed and the background to the text, we need to know what God's words sound like. We need to know what God's word sounds like.

Either way, you want to say the children of Israel could not distinguish between what was being said in the name of Jehovah by this man and what was being said in the name of Jehovah by this man. They could not distinguish. They both sounded like God for all they knew.

They wanted to pick the one they liked. You know, here recently I was discussing talking about the Bible with a member of the church. I'm not sure how old she is, but I know she's well over 60 years old.

Because she said, I grew up in the church and it wasn't until I was almost 60 that I heard about grace. So her entire life, I would assume she had heard the word grace before. But when one person speaks on grace and another person speaks on grace, if you do not know what God says about grace, how are you going to distinguish? And I know how she distinguished.

She picked the view she loved. That is, yes, if we all just give it a good faith effort in the end, we're all going to go to heaven. What does God's word sound like when it speaks about grace, when it speaks about praise, when it speaks about believers? We're all believers.

What does that mean? And then secondly, we need to obey God. If Israel had done this, they would not have come to the end. They did.

We need to obey God, not some form given to us by a man. There's one thing that Hebrews chapter eight, verse 10 relates in this new covenant that would be written on the hearts of man rather than this outward writing. There was a problem there at Israel, they thought they were serving Jehovah God.

They had the temple, they had sacrifices, they had this outward religion. It shouldn't have been that it should have been originating from the heart. But it was not.

God promised there would be a day when his people did act and their actions originate from their heart. So they were able to be brought into this system. They were circumcised.

They were made Jews. They developed this idea that we are God's people. By all these things we're doing, we're just doing the form of what we've been given.

Even if that form is right, if that is the depth of thought that we have, we have erred. Our minds must be in it. And because so many people have depended upon the form given to them at their conversion, they will never change the faith that they were given, regardless of how wrong it might be proven to be.

You think of the Muslims. You're born in a Muslim state. What are you likely going to be? A Muslim.

You are born in a predominantly Catholic area. What are you likely going to be? Catholic. If you're born this denomination, that denomination, this or that, what are you likely going to be? Whatever it is you're born into, because people don't stop and think why.

And so oftentimes in the church, I was born into a family that were members of the church and they taught me what the role of woman is. And let me tell you what the role of woman is, because I've witnessed this for my entire life. A woman should not have a dominant role in the church, a prominent role, should not be up in front, shouldn't pass out cards in that setting, in a spiritual setting, shouldn't pass out the communion unless, unless they're performing skits, because that's the form I was introduced to.

So I justify what I've been given rather than looking at the ideas upon which they're based. That's what Israel did. Well, you see, you can't have a choir in the building.

That's wrong. But you can have one outside the building because I was born into a family that were members of the church and that's how we've always done it. And so the hypocrisy that is seen when someone takes the form, the hypocrisy is just explained away and rationalized.

But when we truly obey God, we don't ask what has a man given me? First Corinthians chapter two, our faith is not in man, it's in God. And I ask, OK, this is what we're doing. But why? What principle did God give me that bases this action upon? OK, if we all need to assemble together to partake of the Lord's supper, if that's necessary, if I can't do it in my house, I mean, if I can do it in my house, why get together? If I can do it here, you can do it there.

We can all separate when we do it, then why come together and do it? But if we must come together and do it, shouldn't we always do it as a group? And I know that the congregation here has addressed that. Too often we practice the form. I don't know how many times I've come into people that say, no, you cannot use drums.

But you can clap all day. Why can't you use drums? Because the Bible says sing. Does it say sing and clap? No, but ever since I've been in the church, we've we've clapped.

We need to obey God. And thirdly, what will prevent us from heading down this path? We need to look to the powerful God, not to powerful neighbors. We need to look to a powerful, the powerful God, not the powerful neighbors.

What was Israel doing? Well, look, here's the enemy, Babylon. What do we say? Here's the enemy, Satan. What did Israel do that led them to the point where there was no return? They kept saying, how can we make a treaty here? How can we do this? How can we do that? How can we get strong enough to overcome, not be overcome by this enemy? I'd say the temptation is and I have to stop myself at times.

Would the world be better off if it was just the church? The faithful, the remnant, would the world be better off? Yes. Oh, yes, there's people in denominations and other religions that stand up for good moral teaching, for good moral doctrine. But what does that say about our faith in God? If he has given the remnant a task and we cannot accomplish the task unless we unite with all these other ungodly people, what kind of task have we been given? We can overcome the enemy if we put our mind to it.

And it would be good to remove all these other satanic options that are put before people that only lead people to Satan. And then, as you look to Ezekiel, chapter 13, look at verse two. Son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel that prophesy and say unto them that prophesy out of their own hearts.

Hear you the word of the Lord. We as a church, as the remnant, if we are going to stay on the right path and start influencing others, what we need to influence them to do is to come to the preachers that are preaching, desiring spiritual edification, not emotional uplift. How often do you hear those? Perhaps you're turning on the TV, turning through the channels and someone just offered a message that was a blessing.

That's a blessing. Or thank you for those encouraging words. That was an encouragement to us today.

It's good to be encouraged by God's word, but there is a great difference from being encouraged into thinking the way I've always thought and to enjoying the things I've always enjoyed. There's a big difference to be from being encouraged down that end to being encouraged to enjoy the things God enjoys. And at times that means destroying a part of who I am.

Jeremiah was told it in this way, I will make my words in thy mouth fire. And this people would and it shall devour them. Can you imagine Jeremiah gives a message of that sort? These words will devour of the nature they are.

They shall devour the wood that they come up against. And then afterward, that was such the emphasis is wrong. And those who are preaching in Ezekiel, chapter 13, verse two, spoke things from their own heart.

They spoke what God had laid on their heart that morning. And the people there were encouraged by those emotional thoughts. And then finally, look at verse six, if we are going to have the preachers and if the church is going to discern as the church needs to discern and have the preachers that should be preaching, preach.

And I can say preach that many times, because as you read verse two, they said prophesy three times. But if you look at verse six, it says they have seen vanity and lying divination, saying the Lord say it and the Lord has not sent them and they have made others to hope that they would confirm the word. If you

are going to listen and be the listeners, if we are going to be the listeners, we ought to be.

We need to be listeners who trust in God's word, not in our conclusions. We need to be listeners that trust in God's word, not in our conclusions, what was Israel doing? They found themselves prophets who said, guess what? Israel is not going to be destroyed. Jerusalem is going to stand.

That's the conclusion. How can you speak to get it there? Might it be Egypt? Might it be God? Might it be this route? I don't care which route you choose. Just give me the conclusion I want.

I know. That my family is safe, I know it. And there's nothing you can say.

That can get me to think otherwise, because I know it and I hope for it, as you look to verse six, they are trusting in the conclusion of what is being said. That is their hope. That is their end.

And there's nothing anybody can say. How many times have you sat down with a family member and said, guess what? God's word says that you must be baptized for the remission of your sins. And they say, I know I'm saved.

That is my hope, that is my trust. They've gone to justify their conclusion rather than to ask, what is God really saying? And this has been a sore on the church for so long. I know I'm right.

And who are you to say otherwise, we've done it this way for so long, we've thought this way for so long, I know we're right. If that is our attitude, something is going to miss. It's not I know I'm right, but rather I know what God's word says and that is what we must search for.

What is the answer? It is not something new to stand up and say that the world, that the earth, that the church there the third time. That the church is in a struggle, that the remnant is in a struggle. I know that Kevin would agree when I went down to Texas at first.

Spoke there in the panhandle, I knew nothing about Texas, as a matter of fact, there was a little bit of disappointment when I saw Clarendon because I saw on the map how close it was to Amarillo. And I said, well, by that time you're seeing billboards and you're exiting off of a ramp and everybody's going 70 miles an hour, there's life and then there can be a day I'll just get up and drive a little closer and get to the get to the, you know, metropolitan area. But when I drove down there, I realized that was far from what I was accustomed to viewing a city as Kansas City has all that Amarillo doesn't.

But I was also surprised that Amarillo was full of churches, lots of churches. Lubbock, just south of Amarillo, full of churches, but churches that are as quick as they can, as quickly as they can running down the path to destruction. You will be hard pressed to find two, maybe three in Amarillo standing for what is right.

And in Lubbock where congregations and Amarillo where congregations exceed a thousand members. You'll be hard pressed to find more than one. And what are these congregations doing, supporting Franklin Graham, one congregations taking the name off the door and other congregations are competing for members with that congregation.

There is a battle at hand, false preachers gone amok and congregations who love it. But we as the remnant must make certain that we know the truth and are standing for it and never stop. The prophet that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully.

Jeremiah, chapter 23, verse 28. And perhaps to the church, First Thessalonians, chapter five, prove all things, hold fast to that which is good. Thank you.

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