

Ezekiel 13:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

O Israel, thy prophets are like the foxes in the deserts.

Analysis

God condemns false prophets: 'O Israel, thy prophets are like the foxes in the deserts.' Foxes in ruins were destructive scavengers, not builders or protectors. False prophets similarly exploited national crisis for personal gain rather than addressing root causes. The Hebrew *shu'alim* (שׁוּעִלִים, 'foxes/jackals') denotes cunning, opportunistic creatures inhabiting desolate places.

The comparison emphasizes false prophets' destructiveness—like foxes digging among ruins, they weakened rather than strengthened society's moral/spiritual foundations. They should have been repairing breaches but instead exploited them. Their ministry left people more vulnerable, not more protected, by fostering false security through comfortable lies.

From a Reformed perspective, this warns that harmful ministry isn't just ineffective teaching but actively destructive deception. False teachers don't merely fail to help; they actively harm by misdirecting people from truth and hindering genuine spiritual formation. This necessitates church discipline and doctrinal boundaries to protect congregations from destructive influences.

Historical Context

Foxes in deserts/ruins imagery appears elsewhere in Scripture (Lamentations 5:18, Song of Solomon 2:15). These animals were common in desolate areas, scavenging and burrowing. The metaphor would resonate with Ezekiel's audience—just as foxes exploit ruins rather than rebuild, false prophets exploited national crisis for

profit and influence rather than calling for repentance.

Archaeological evidence from ancient Israel shows fox remains in ruined sites. The imagery wasn't abstract but drew on concrete observation. False prophets' fox-like behavior contrasted with faithful prophets' attempts to repair covenant relationship and restore right worship. One group exploited crisis; the other addressed it at root level.

Related Passages

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. How does the fox metaphor illustrate the difference between ministry that exploits versus ministry that restores?
2. What characteristics of false teaching actively harm people rather than merely failing to help?
3. In what ways might ministers, even unintentionally, act like foxes rather than faithful shepherds?

Interlinear Text

כְּשֹׁעַל יִם	בְּחֶרֶב וְזֶה	נְבִיאֵי יְיָ	יִשְׂרָאֵל ל	הִיוּ:
are like the foxes	in the deserts	thy prophets	O Israel	H1961
H7776	H2723	H5030	H3478	

Additional Cross-References

Revelation 19:20 (Prophecy): And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone.

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