

Ezekiel 13:17-4:11—Vain Worship And A Divided Heart

Memory Verse

Ezekiel 36:26-27 NKJV

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them.

Revision: A summary of Ezekiel 13:1-16 and Jeremiah 23:14-17—God was angry with the false prophets because they:

- Encouraged the people to continue in their sin and therefore not repent and turn back to God
- Filled people with false, empty, or futile hopes
- Lived an immoral and dishonest life
- Caused the land to become corrupt (by application, cause the church to become corrupt)
- Say to those who despise, ignore, or neglect the word of God that they will have peace (people are told that they have peace with God, or are saved, when in fact they are actually condemned)
- Say to those who stubbornly follow their own desires that “No harm will come your way!” (that is, you can continue a living a life of sin and there won’t be any judgement or price to pay)
- Make up everything they say, claiming it is from the Lord

This week:

1. ***God rebukes the female false prophets/sorcerers/witches—13:17-23***
2. ***Vain worship: A divided heart—pretending to draw near but having idols in our hearts—14:1-11***

1. God rebukes the female false prophets/sorcerers/witches

Ezekiel 13:17-23 NKJV

“Likewise, son of man, set your face against the daughters of your people, who prophesy out of their own heart; prophesy against them, ¹⁸ and say, ‘Thus says the Lord God: “Woe to the women who sew magic charms on their sleeves and make veils for the heads of people of every height to hunt souls! Will you hunt the souls of My people, and keep yourselves alive? ¹⁹ And will you profane Me among My people for handfuls of barley and for pieces of bread, killing people who should not die, and keeping people alive who should not live, by your lying to My people who listen to lies?”’

²⁰ ‘Therefore thus says the Lord God: “Behold, I am against your magic charms by which you hunt souls there like birds. I will tear them from your arms, and let the souls go, the souls you hunt like birds. ²¹ I will also tear off your veils and deliver My people out of your hand, and they shall no longer be as prey in your hand. Then you shall know that I am the Lord.

²² “Because with lies you have made the heart of the righteous sad, whom I have not made sad; and you have strengthened the hands of the wicked, so that he does not turn from his wicked way to save his life. ²³ Therefore you shall no longer envision futility nor practice divination; for I will deliver My people out of your hand, and you shall know that I am the Lord.” ’ ’ ”

God is against the female false prophets (13:17–19)

v 17 **“Likewise, son of man, set your face against the daughters of your people, who prophesy out of their own heart; prophesy against them:** Ezekiel now speaks against the self-proclaimed or false female prophetesses. This raises the question of whether or not females could be prophets in Judaism and/or the church.

“Women held a higher place in Israel than among most other nations. While there were no priestesses in Israel, the nation knew the prophetic ministry of women.” (Feinberg)

There are several examples of female prophets in both the Old and New Testaments:

- Miriam, the sister of Moses (Exodus 15:20; Numbers 12:2).
- Deborah (Judges 4:4).
- Huldah (2 Kings 22:14).
- The wife of Isaiah (Isaiah 8:3).
- Noadiah, a false prophetess (Nehemiah 6:14).
- Anna, the daughter of Phanuel (Luke 2:36).
- The four daughters of Philip (Acts 21:9).

It’s interesting that God refuses to dignify these self-proclaimed false prophetesses with the title of ‘prophetess’ (Hebrew: *nebia*), which the other real prophetesses were called by. Instead Ezekiel simply just describes them as **“the daughters of your people, who prophesy out of their own heart”**.

v 17 **Who prophesy out of their own heart:** “One basic failing of the female false prophets was the same as false prophets in general (Ezekiel 13:2). They spoke **out of their own heart**, not from God and His word. It is common for people to trust their own hearts instead of God’s revelation.” (David Guzik)

v 18 **‘Thus says the Lord God: “Woe to the women who sew magic charms on their sleeves and make veils for the heads of people of every height to hunt souls! Will you hunt the souls of My people, and keep yourselves alive?:** Here we start to see some very significant differences between the male false prophets and the female false prophetesses. The false prophetesses used magic and sorcery to make a living for themselves, casting spells and curses for money, and probably also conducted seances and were fortune tellers.

“Ezekiel’s language suggests that these were more like witches or sorceresses who practised strange magic arts (compare 1 Samuel 28:7).” (Taylor)

“In Babylonia Jewish women were selling charms and’ spells. They were ready to do anything for even a small reward, putting a curse on the innocent, and promising a long and safe life for wrongdoers.” (Wright)

v 18 **Will you hunt the souls of My people:** Here God gives a very clear warning against this demonic activity. There is real power in the demonic realm, and those who use it for their own gain will face severe judgement.

Unfortunately the practice of false prophetesses (and prophets) *hunting souls* continues. The New Age religion, Hinduism, Buddhism, transcendental meditation, yoga, animism with its witch doctors and totems, satanism, Wicca, witches, wizards, and even some forms of marshal arts etc, all tap into the occult or demonic realm.

Another question we can ask ourselves is, what does it mean to hunt souls?

“It is not possible that the word for soul (Hebrew *nepes*) could have the meaning of a disembodied spirit: this is a totally unhebraic concept. It means the total person, the self, not just a part of him.” (Taylor)

We see this in the next verse where it tells us that the result of their demonic or occultic activity was that people died; they were looking to kill not just the soul, but also the body.

v 19 **Will you profane Me among My people for handfuls of barley and for pieces of bread:** It appears that the phrase, “**keep yourselves alive**”, refers to them making a living for themselves through their false words, ceremonies, and actions. However there is also another understanding or interpretation.

“Barley and bread were also instruments of sorcery (v.19). Some have understood the bread and barley to represent the cheap payment these prophetesses would accept in return for their occult practices; but Hittite practices and later Syrian rituals demonstrate that divination was carried out with barley bread either as part of the pagan sacrificial ritual or as a means of determining whether the victim would live or die.” (Alexander)

Application: Don't be deceived!

v 19 **Profane Me:** These women, like the men, carried out their their deceitful, but also occultic practices in the name of the Lord. It's strange to think that people would attempt to do and say such wicked things in the name of the Lord, but it's nothing new.

“With their sorcerous invocation of the divine name, the women have degraded Yahweh in the public's eyes to the level of the Babylonian deities and demons, who let themselves be manipulated by divination and witchcraft.” (Block)

2 Corinthians 11:12-15 NKJV

But what I do, I will also continue to do, that I may cut off the opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the things of which they boast. ¹³ For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. ¹⁴ And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. ¹⁵ Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.

1 Timothy 4:1-2 NKJV

Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, **giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons**, ² speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron.

Satan has been deceiving people through his demonic ministers ever since the tower of Babel with its false one-world religion, and probably before as well. Also consider what it will be like in the end times:

Revelation 9:20-21 NKJV

But the rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, that they should not **worship demons**, and idols of gold, silver, brass, stone, and wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk. ²¹ And they did not repent of their murders or their **sorceries [witchcraft/drugs]** or their sexual immorality or their thefts.

So you see that for a long time satan has been using religion, especially those who claim to be representing God, to deceive people with doctrines of demons. Jesus put it this way:

Matthew 12:30 NLT paraphrase

“Anyone who isn’t with me opposes me, and anyone who isn’t working with me is actually working against me.

No matter how nice the preacher may sound, if he’s not teaching salvation by repentance and faith, he’s working for satan; he is a liar and deceiver pretending to be a minister of righteousness.

v 19 **By your lying to My people who listen to lies:** “The false prophetesses were guilty of **lying** to God’s own **people**; yet the people were guilty because they did **listen to lies**. If none of God’s people listened to false prophets, there would be much fewer of them.” (David Guzik)

“They had used deceptive and counterfeit means to dishearten the righteous, pulling them into their cultic snare and influence. At the same time they encouraged the wicked to disobey God’s ways.” (Alexander)

I believe that this exhortation and warning that Paul gives us has never been more applicable than in today’s church. Truly, we could call this Laodicean church age in which we live, the “*church of the itching ears*”—they live to have their itch scratched, to be told what they want to hear.

2 Timothy 4:1-5 AMP

I charge [you] in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, Who is to judge the living and the dead, and by (in the light of) His coming and His kingdom: ² herald and preach the Word! Keep your sense of urgency [stand by, be at hand and ready], whether the opportunity seems to be favourable or unfavourable. [Whether it is convenient or inconvenient, whether it is welcome or unwelcome, you as preacher of the Word are to show people in what way their lives are wrong.] And convince them, rebuking and correcting, warning and urging and encouraging them, being unflagging and inexhaustible in patience and teaching.

³ **For the time is coming when [people] will not tolerate (endure) sound and wholesome instruction, but, having ears itching [for something pleasing and gratifying], they will gather to themselves one teacher after another to a considerable number, chosen to satisfy their own liking and to foster the errors they hold, ⁴ and will turn aside from hearing the truth and wander off into myths and man-made fictions.**

Once again, we come back to the free choice that God gives people. God allows the lies because He won’t force people to listen to the truth. Ever since the garden of Eden, God has given mankind free choice to choose Him or reject Him. *Listening to lies is rejecting Him, so be careful who you listen to.*

God is against the magic charms of the female false prophets (13:20–21)

Ezekiel 13:20-21 NKJV

“Therefore thus says the Lord God: “Behold, I am against your magic charms by which you hunt souls there like birds. I will tear them from your arms, and let the souls go, the souls you hunt like birds. ²¹ I will also tear off your veils and deliver My people out of your hand, and they shall no longer be as prey in your hand. Then you shall know that I am the Lord.

v 20 **I am against your magic charms by which you hunt souls:** The false prophetesses were using **magic charms** and ceremonies to **hunt** or pursue vulnerable **souls**.

“The women who made use of them were not, for this prophet, carnival gypsies whom one frequents for amusement; they were practitioners of the dark arts.” (Vawter and Hoppe)

v 21 **I will tear them from your arms, and let the souls go:** God here promises to judge the false prophetesses, and to rescue the people (**souls**) from their evil spells and incantations.

v 21 **Then you shall know that I am the Lord:** Once again, God has told everyone what He was going to do. All that was left was for God to fulfil the promise or prediction, which would prove to all that He is outside of time, knows all things, is sovereign over all things, and therefore in complete control of all things.

Two negative effects of the lies of the false prophets (13:22–23)

Ezekiel 13:22-23 NKJV

“Because with lies you have made the heart of the righteous sad, whom I have not made sad; and you have strengthened the hands of the wicked, so that he does not turn from his wicked way to save his life. ²³ Therefore you shall no longer envision futility nor practice divination; for I will deliver My people out of your hand, and you shall know that I am the Lord.” ’ ’

This applies to both the male prophets and female false prophetesses. The two negative effects of their lies (which are also very applicable for today) are:

1. **“Because with lies you have made the heart of the righteous sad, whom I have not made sad”** (v 22): The hearts of the righteous were made sad by their lies spoken in the name of the Lord. Again, this is so applicable to today’s church. How many people are there out there who have been burned by false doctrine, false promises, false hopes, false expectations, bad experiences, or sheer neglect. Many of these people now refuse to go to church and remain out of fellowship. They are missing out on the joy of fellowship that results from the communion of the saints. They are coals gone cold, having left the fire. Many remain bitter, disillusioned, angry, and frustrated with the church, or even worse still, with God. To any believers like this I would encourage you to reach out and find a church that teaches the word of God expositively (verse by verse, chapter by chapter). Read your bibles to see if what they are teaching lines up with Scripture (see Acts 17:11). If it doesn’t line up with Scripture, then get out of there—what’s the point of getting burned, hurt, or deceived yet again.
2. **“You have strengthened the hands of the wicked, so that he does not turn from his wicked way to save his life”** (v 22): The false prophets convinced many unbelievers that they could continue living for themselves without fear of judgement —“repent” would have been a dirty word to these false teachers. The people listening to the lies may not have been doing anything particularly evil, but their focus was on themselves and them seeking their own pleasure and wellbeing. There was no calling people to repent or count the cost of becoming a disciple of Christ. Instead their message would be similar to the well known catch phrase of one of today’s false teachers, “God just wants you to feel good about yourself”. In other words, “God accepts you as you are, you don’t and won’t need to change or repent.”

v 23 **Therefore you shall no longer envision futility nor practice divination; for I will deliver My people out of your hand:** “God promised to put an end to the false prophets. They visions were futility and their ceremonies were not worship, but divination. God promised to **deliver** His people from their deceptions.” (David Guzik)

“What is unmistakable is that they degraded the name of the Lord by linking it with superstitions and magical practices.” (Feinberg)

If you look at the false teachings swirling around the church, especially in the emergent church, the various cults, and the like, many of the teachings are taken directly from the New Age and other religions. Be careful that you are not deceived, they use the same words but are **equivocating**, meaning they purposefully “*use ambiguous language so as to conceal the truth or avoid committing oneself*” (dictionary). They basically don’t mean what they say, and initially will sell you something that sounds very close to true Christianity. But slowly, gradually, as you get hooked into and dependant upon their organisation, they will start to reveal to you what they really mean by the spiritual jargon they use, and you will slowly be led away from the truth and into lies by their seemingly sound teaching and logic. Remember that the most dangerous lie is the one that is closest to the truth. Why? Because it’s the hardest one to discern. One brand of rat bait is only 0.005% poison, yet it kills the rats with a single feed.

2. Vain worship: A divided heart—pretending to draw near but having idols in our hearts (14:1-11)

“A group of elders came to Ezekiel seemingly to get counsel from the Lord, but the Lord said they were playing games because they were still heavily involved in idolatry.” (Jon Courson)

Matthew 6:21 NLT paraphrase

Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be.

The main message we get from this section of scripture is that we can fool ourselves into thinking that we are genuinely seeking God and wanting to obey Him, when our true or primary affections actually lie elsewhere. We can easily fail to guard our hearts (see Proverbs 4:23), and therefore grow to love someone or something more than God, some idol that is by definition more important to us than God. We then end up only giving God our second best; the leftovers of our time, commitment, energy, resources, money, and affections, whatever we haven’t spent on our true first love. There can be many seconds in our lives, but only one first. All of us have something that we prioritise above everything else—if it’s God we will be blessed, but if not, God will not reveal Himself to us if we are not seeking Him with our whole heart (sincerely or honestly).

Ezekiel 14:1-11 NKJV

Now some of the elders of Israel came to me and sat before me. ² And the word of the Lord came to me, saying, ³ “Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their hearts, and put before them that which causes them to stumble into iniquity. Should I let Myself be inquired of at all by them?

⁴ “Therefore speak to them, and say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God: “Everyone of the house of Israel who sets up his idols in his heart, and puts before him what causes him to stumble into iniquity, and then comes to the prophet, I the Lord will answer him who comes, according to the multitude of his idols, ⁵ that I may seize the house of Israel by their heart, because they are all estranged from Me by their idols.” ’

⁶ “Therefore say to the house of Israel, ‘Thus says the Lord God: “Repent, turn away from your idols, and turn your faces away from all your abominations. ⁷ For anyone of the house of Israel, or of the strangers who dwell in Israel, who separates himself from Me and sets up his idols in his heart and puts before him what causes him to stumble into iniquity, then comes to a prophet to inquire of

him concerning Me, I the Lord will answer him by Myself. ⁸ I will set My face against that man and make him a sign and a proverb, and I will cut him off from the midst of My people. Then you shall know that I am the Lord.

⁹ “And if the prophet is induced to speak anything, I the Lord have induced that prophet, and I will stretch out My hand against him and destroy him from among My people Israel. ¹⁰ And they shall bear their iniquity; the punishment of the prophet shall be the same as the punishment of the one who inquired, ¹¹ that the house of Israel may no longer stray from Me, nor be profaned anymore with all their transgressions, but that they may be My people and I may be their God,” says the Lord God.’ ”

God reveals the divided (idolatrous) hearts of the Israelite leaders in exile (1–3)

Ezekiel 14:1-3 NKJV

Now some of the elders of Israel came to me and sat before me. ² And the word of the Lord came to me, saying, ³ “Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their hearts, and put before them that which causes them to stumble into iniquity. Should I let Myself be inquired of at all by them?

v 1 **Now some of the elders of Israel came to me and sat before me:** These were the **elders** that visited Ezekiel previously (see Ezekiel 8:1). They were the leaders of the Israelite community in exile, mainly in Babylon.

“They had come presumably in the hope of hearing some oracle about the length of their exile or giving news of affairs at home in Jerusalem. The oracle was given, but it was not what they expected.” (Taylor)

“They pretend they want to listen to the prophet. It is like coming to church with a big Bible under your arm, pretending you want to serve the Lord.” (McGee)

v 2-3 **And the word of the Lord came to me, saying, ³ “Son of man, These men had set up idols in their hearts:** God gave Ezekiel supernatural wisdom to know what was in their hearts. This was similar to the New Testament gift called the “word of knowledge” in 1 Corinthians 12:8. Even though their idols were not outward, they were still just as guilty as the other idol worshippers condemned in Ezekiel 8:10-12, 8:16.

v 3 **And put before them that which causes them to stumble into iniquity:** Their secret idols caused them to **stumble into iniquity**—their secret idols (unconfessed sin) were the reason that they were still continuing to sin.

Application: A hidden idol will cause us to fail in other areas of our lives

I know from experience that in my own life, my heart can be seeking some pleasure or other goal ahead of Christ, but the outward routine of my life doesn't really change—I'm still reading my Bible, going to church, going to work. It's almost impossible for others to see that I have new priorities, that I'm not actually living for God anymore, that my heart is not in it, but rather I'm living for myself. Common idols of the heart include desires for: a spouse, to be single again or to have a “better” spouse, financial security, a comfortable life, to be accepted, loved, and admired by those around us, various addictions, and sporting and career goals. However, God knows where my true affections lie, and while I choose to be controlled by my sinful nature I will not be able to please God (see Romans 8:5-7), and I will be out of fellowship with God.

Isaiah 59:2 NKJV

But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear.

While my heart is divided I will experience emptiness or a feeling of distance or separation from God and will most likely struggle with some form of habitual sin, whether it be lust, TV, unforgiveness, facebook/social media, or substance abuse because the Holy Spirit will not be enabling me to overcome as I am grieving Him (see Ephesians 4:30).

v 3 **Should I let Myself be inquired of at all by them?**: The answer is obviously no. Their morning bible studies would have been dry, their prayer life lacking fervency; God is under no obligation to speak to or reveal Himself to those who harbour secret sin.

“The word of the Lord revealed to him that whatever their outward attitude might be, they were at heart idolaters, and he was charged to declare to them that while idolatry remained in their heart they were necessarily estranged from Jehovah.” (Morgan)

“The charge against them is that they have been infected by their Babylonian environment and the attractions of its idolatrous religion. Nothing had changed outwardly in their allegiance to the Lord, but they had taken *idols into their hearts*.” (Taylor)

“They were like the people in Isaiah’s day who drew near to God with words but not with their hearts (Isaiah 29:13). Jesus said that the Pharisees in His day were guilty of the same sin (Matthew 15:8–9).” (Wiersbe)

“Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5) and the rich young ruler (Matthew 19:16–26) are New Testament examples of those who looked spiritual on the outside but had idols in their hearts. No wonder John closed his first letter, *little children, keep yourselves from idols* (1 John 5:21).” (David Guzik)

“This verse is important for those who come to Scripture seeking guidance. No true direction can be given to those who have erected idols in their hearts.” (Alexander)

“Can these men seriously consult me? Is it fit I should give counsel to obstinate, resolved sinners, who come to inquire, but will not hearken? *Should I help them in their distress, who depend on idols which I hate?*” (Poole)

God’s response to those with secret idols (4–5)

Ezekiel 14:4-5 NKJV

“Therefore speak to them, and say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God: “Everyone of the house of Israel who sets up his idols in his heart, and puts before him what causes him to stumble into iniquity, and then comes to the prophet, I the Lord will answer him who comes, according to the multitude of his idols, ⁵ that I may seize the house of Israel by their heart, because they are all estranged from Me by their idols.” ’

v 4 **I the Lord will answer him who comes, according to the multitude of his idols**: Here God promises to give an answer, but it not what they want to hear; it will be **according to the multitude of his idols**, in other words they will hear a message of judgement.

v 5 **That I may seize [capture] the house of Israel by their heart**: This is the primary reason God disciplines us by removing the idol—that our heart or affections may be turned back to Him. God wants all of us, the best of everything we are and have; not just the left overs, not just second best.

v 5 **Because they are all estranged from Me by their idols:** We need to be so careful to guard our hearts (see Proverbs 4:23), because it is so easy for an idol to steal our affections (our love) from God. It's like an unfaithful spouse giving their heart to another; it's not like they did it intentionally. What we must understand is that, without conscious effort and discernment, just like a spouses heart can easily and unintentionally be given away to a stranger, so can an idol steal our affections from God. If I don't guard my heart (my affections), and consciously seek to keep my relationship with God as number one, then it won't be. Relationships require work, commitment, and must be protected.

God's message to those with idols in their hearts: Repent (v 6)

Ezekiel 14:6 NKJV

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

This is the only answer God will give you if you are coming to Him with a divided heart. Repentance, turning away from our sin and turning to God is the only cure or answer for our separation or broken relationship or fellowship with God.

God's warning of judgement to those who are hypocrites, who have ears but are not willing to hear, who have hard hearts (v 7-8)

Ezekiel 14:7-8 NKJV

For anyone of the house of Israel, or of the strangers who dwell in Israel, who separates himself from Me and sets up his idols in his heart and puts before him what causes him to stumble into iniquity, then comes to a prophet to inquire of him concerning Me, I the Lord will answer him by Myself. ⁸ I will set My face against that man and make him a sign and a proverb, and I will cut him off from the midst of My people. Then you shall know that I am the Lord.

v 7 **Who separates himself from Me and sets up his idols in his heart and puts before him what causes him to stumble into iniquity:** Notice here that although our drifting and compromising heart may not have been intentional or deliberate (I didn't wake up one morning and declare, "I'm going to separate myself from God today by choosing to love something more than God"), I am still responsible for it because I have been negligent—I have not guarded my heart—I have not been faithful to protect my relationship with God from intruders. This includes prevention and eradication.

v 7 **Then comes to a prophet to inquire of him concerning Me:** How foolish it is to think that we can be living for ourselves and yet expect to hear from God on Sunday when we come to church or read the Bible each day.

v 8 **I will set My face against that man and make him a sign and a proverb:** The punishment described here against the double-hearted or double-minded man is that God would oppose them—they would become known for their foolishness.

God's promised punishment of the false prophets and their listeners (9-11)

Ezekiel 14:9-11 NKJV

"And if the [false] prophet is induced to speak anything, I the Lord have induced that prophet, and I will stretch out My hand against him and destroy him from among My people Israel. ¹⁰ And they shall bear their iniquity; the punishment of the prophet shall be the same as the punishment of the one who inquired, ¹¹ that the house of Israel may no longer stray from Me, nor be profaned anymore with all their transgressions, but that they may be My people and I may be their God," says the Lord God.'"

Here is an amazing description of how God judges those with divided hearts (the false or insincere seekers) along with the false prophets. If the false seeker goes to a false prophet—who wants to tell the false seeker what they want to hear—God will actually induce the false prophet to say just that. What this means is that God will strengthen both the false seeker and the false prophet in their deception. It's the old saying, "there's nothing worse than God giving us what we want when it's not according to His will." It's like God is saying, "If it's deception you want, it's deception you'll get; I'm going to let you experience the painful natural consequences of your sin."

v 9 **I will stretch out My hand against him and destroy him from among My people Israel:** "God's ultimate response to that false prophet would be to destroy him. Even if God used the false prophet to give the idolater the deception they longed for, God would still send judgment upon the false and wicked prophet." (David Guzik).

v 10 **The punishment of the prophet shall be the same as the punishment of the one who inquired:** After all, there would be very few false prophets if nobody listened to them and supported them. The only reason there are so many false prophets is because there are so many people wanting to be deceived, to have their itch scratched.

"Neither shall excuse [the] other; but as they have sinned together, so shall they suffer together." (Trapp)

v 11 **That the house of Israel may no longer stray from Me, nor be profaned anymore... but that they may be My people and I may be their God:** God has always been in the business of reconciling people to Himself (see 2 Corinthians 5:18-21) and here is no different. Here again we see God's heart: "Yahweh's desire is for a people who will never *stray* from him again. The word [**stray**] derives from the realm of animal husbandry but is also applied to persons who are lost." (Block)

Summary and Conclusion: God is seeking relationship with people

The big picture today has been God seeking restored fellowship with His people. God in dealing honestly and directly with the sins of the people makes it clear that there are consequences to our sin, and that we are responsible, both for falling away from God and for repenting so we can come back to God. However, God goes to great lengths to lead us to repentance.

I see in Israel at this time a picture of the prodigal son. They take all the blessings that God gives them and then spend them all on worldly living. However, they soon find themselves in dire straights (similar to the son starving to death in the pig pen), and they eventually come to their senses, repent, and come back to God, who welcomes them back with a warm embrace. Again, always remember that God's heart, His greatest desire for all people of all times is that "**they may be My people and I may be their God**" (also see 1 Timothy 2:3-6)

Maybe there are some here today who have set up idols in their hearts. We may not be wasting what God has given us in wild living, but our hearts are elsewhere, we know we are insincere, double-minded, unstable in all our ways, as we struggle with some sin or desire, something that we just can't seem to conquer—day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year. The answer is clear and simple. Repent. Humble yourself in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up (James 4:10). Trust Him, commit your heart to Him as a wise and loving Saviour, and then guard your heart so you keep yourself in the love of God. Strive to never again let anything steal away your affections.