

**Ezek. 14:1 Then came certain of the elders of Israel unto me, and sat before me.**

**Ezek. 14:2 And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying,**

**Ezek. 14:3 Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their heart, and put the stumblingblock of their iniquity before their face: should I be enquired of at all by them?**

Ezekiel now tells us about another time that the elders have come to sit before him, to hear a message from the Lord one would presume, and he receives another message from the Lord. As I continued to read, I thought the Hebrew for the word “sat” was enlightening; it states: “to sit down (specifically as judge. in ambush, in quiet)...” The Lord tells Ezekiel that these men have idols in their heart and are clinging to their sin. It would seem that these leaders of the people are putting on an outward show of wanting to know God’s will, but are unwilling to yield their lives to Him as Lord and repent of their sin. The Hebrew would indicate that they are looking for an opportunity to attack Ezekiel and in turn the Lord based on the word he/He gives them. Because of their attitude, the Lord indicates that they have no right to seek direction from Him.

**Ezek. 14:4 Therefore speak unto them, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Every man of the house of Israel that setteth up his idols in his heart, and putteth the stumblingblock of his iniquity before his face, and cometh to the prophet; I the LORD will answer him that cometh according to the multitude of his idols;**

**Ezek. 14:5 That I may take the house of Israel in their own heart, because they are all estranged from me through their idols.**

The Lord tells Ezekiel to tell these men that if they come to the prophet seeking direction from YHWH while worshipping idols in their heart and clinging to their sin without repentance, He is going to give them an answer according to the “god” they are worshipping. They have chosen to worship idols and reject His authority, so He is going to withhold His wisdom from them. Only by letting the people experience the uselessness of their faith in these idols, will they be willing to recognize their need for the true God. The writer of Proverbs expressed some wisdom that mirrors these thoughts.

Prov. 1:27 When your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you.

Prov. 1:28 Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me:

Prov. 1:29 For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the LORD:

Prov. 1:30 They would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof.

Prov. 1:31 Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices.

Prov. 1:32 For the turning away of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them.

Prov. 1:33 But whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil.

**Ezek. 14:6 Therefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Repent, and turn *yourselves* from your idols; and turn away your faces from all your abominations.**

Ezekiel is to tell his people that the LORD GOD is calling for them to repent, and turn from their idols and evil ways.

**Ezek. 14:7 For every one of the house of Israel, or of the stranger that sojourneth in Israel, which separateth himself from me, and setteth up his idols in his heart, and putteth the stumblingblock of his iniquity before his face, and cometh to a prophet to enquire of him concerning me; I the LORD will answer him by myself:**

**Ezek. 14:8 And I will set my face against that man, and will make him a sign and a proverb, and I will cut him off from the midst of my people; and ye shall know that I *am* the LORD.**

The Lord's message goes on to state that those who identify themselves as part of the nation of Israel, whether through birth or through choice, and chooses to reject God as LORD and worship idols and cling to their sin will establish themselves as enemies of God. If they come to a true prophet of God seeking His wisdom, God will personally answer him with judgment and destruction. God intends to act so as to give the people no other option but to recognize Him as LORD.

**Ezek. 14:9 And if the prophet be deceived when he hath spoken a thing, I the LORD have deceived that prophet, and I will stretch out my hand upon him, and will destroy him from the midst of my people Israel.**

We need to remember that the context of Ezekiel's message has been to false prophets and the willingness of the people to believe those false prophets and reject God's true prophets. These false prophets had chosen to declare lies and deceit; therefore, the Lord is going to allow that prophet to experience judgment as he is given over to his own deceptions and lies. He will be destroyed and no longer allowed to deceive the God's people.

**Ezek. 14:10 And they shall bear the punishment of their iniquity: the punishment of the prophet shall be even as the punishment of him that seeketh *unto* him;**

**Ezek. 14:11 That the house of Israel may go no more astray from me, neither be polluted any more with all their transgressions; but that they may be my people, and I may be their God, saith the Lord GOD.**

In fact, God is going to cleanse the nation of Israel of all false prophets and idol worshippers. Both the false prophet and those that choose to follow his prophecies will be punished and destroyed. The nation of Israel is going to be cleansed from idol worship. God will be LORD in Israel.

Obviously, this has not come to complete fulfillment. I spent quite a bit of time trying to find verification for the absence of idol worship in Israel after the return from the Babylonian captivity, but did not find it. I believe the nation of Israel did not fall again into serious idol worship. However, they (just as we) still struggled with giving God the priority in their lives. They even ended up making the law an idol. That was really the root of the sin of the Pharisees; they were more concerned about keeping the letter of the law without regard for responding to God from their heart and understanding His intent in establishing that law. The fact remains that some day the nation of Israel will follow God in

faith and obedience and will continue that way throughout the millennium and into eternity. That will be in fulfillment of the words of the prophet Jeremiah:

Jer. 31:33 But this *shall be* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.

Jer. 31:34 And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

Only the unconditional love of God could respond to such wickedness and rebellion with such forgiveness and grace.

**Ezek. 14:12 The word of the LORD came again to me, saying,**

**Ezek. 14:13 Son of man, when the land sinneth against me by trespassing grievously, then will I stretch out mine hand upon it, and will break the staff of the bread thereof, and will send famine upon it, and will cut off man and beast from it:**

Ezekiel receives yet another word from the LORD. What stands out to me as the Lord begins to give this message to Ezekiel is that He says, “when the land sinneth...” In other words, the fact is that the people will sin. The Hebrew for the phrase “trespassing grievously” is referencing covert action; in other words, they are going to try to hide their sin from the Lord. They will probably try to cover their sin by hiding behind a public display of obedience—but God knows the heart of man. He will respond by sending famine and causing many to die—both man and beast.

**Ezek. 14:14 Though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they should deliver *but* their own souls by their righteousness, saith the Lord GOD.**

This verse brings to mind Abraham’s negotiation with the Lord over the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah. The Lord declares that even if Noah, Daniel and Job were living in Israel when they again fall into sin and rebellion, their prayers and intercession on behalf of the people would accomplish nothing. Their own souls would be delivered because they obeyed God in righteousness; but their attempts to intervene for anyone else would be useless.

What an amazing declaration by God! What a wonderful example these three men provide us. Noah, Daniel and Job are all singled out because of their consistent righteous testimony in the most trying of circumstances. Job’s inner struggle was recorded for our benefit; and even though he reached the lowest low, he never cursed God or lost His faith. We know that Daniel was driven to prayer as he sought to preserve his life and that of his friends, but he never doubted that God would deliver them. We know that Noah was ridiculed as he spent 100 years preaching and building an ark in obedience to God’s command, but he never deterred in his obedience. We tend to think that those with the most powerful testimonies are those that have been saved out of wicked, sinful living. These men have powerful testimonies because of their righteous living from a very early age. They example the victorious walk of faith and obedience that we should all strive to emulate.

Also interesting to note—Daniel was a contemporary of the captives to whom Ezekiel was speaking. His reputation would be well known and would certainly emphasize the difference in a righteous life of faith and a wicked life of disobedience. William MacDonald made an important observation in his *Believer's Bible Commentary*, "it is not just the men of old who can live a victorious life of righteousness and faith. That life is possible for men and women of faith in all generations. Just as Daniel could serve as an example for the people of his day, we in the body of believers today can live a victorious life of faith and obedience through the empowerment of the Spirit."

**Ezek. 14:15 If I cause noisome beasts to pass through the land, and they spoil it, so that it be desolate, that no man may pass through because of the beasts:**

**Ezek. 14:16 Though these three men *were* in it, as I live, saith the Lord GOD, they shall deliver neither sons nor daughters; they only shall be delivered, but the land shall be desolate.**

"spoil" = "to miscarry, i.e. suffer abortion; by analogy, to bereave (literally or figuratively):—bereave (of children)..."

If God decides to judge the nation by bringing in evil creatures that attack and kill the children and make men fearful of traveling through the land, even Noah, Daniel or Job would not be able to intercede successfully on behalf of the people. They wouldn't even be able to deliver their own sons and daughters. They would only be able to deliver themselves. The land would suffer the decreed judgment.

**Ezek. 14:17 Or if I bring a sword upon that land, and say, Sword, go through the land; so that I cut off man and beast from it:**

**Ezek. 14:18 Though these three men *were* in it, as I live, saith the Lord GOD, they shall deliver neither sons nor daughters, but they only shall be delivered themselves.**

Even if the Lord decides to allow an enemy army to invade the land and destroy the people and their livestock, no one will be able to intervene on behalf of the people—not even Noah, Daniel or Job. Again, they would only be able to deliver themselves—no one else.

**Ezek. 14:19 Or if I send a pestilence into that land, and pour out my fury upon it in blood, to cut off from it man and beast:**

**Ezek. 14:20 Though Noah, Daniel, and Job, *were* in it, as I live, saith the Lord GOD, they shall deliver neither son nor daughter; they shall *but* deliver their own souls by their righteousness.**

*Pestilence* is a reference to plague and disease. If God judges the people for their sin in His wrath and chooses to send pestilence and cause man and beast to be destroyed, not even Noah, Daniel or Job would be able to intercede on their behalf. Again, point is made that they would only be able to deliver themselves.

I think another important point that God is making is that every individual is accountable for his/her own response to Him.

**Ezek. 14:21** For thus saith the Lord GOD; How much more when I send my four sore judgments upon Jerusalem, the sword, and the famine, and the noisome beast, and the pestilence, to cut off from it man and beast?

This verse indicates that the timing is “when” not “if” He will choose to judge the people of Jerusalem in this way. God claims four types of punishment or judgment as indicative of His judgment: the sword, famine, noisome beast, and pestilence or plague.

In my study of the book of Revelation, this verse came to mind more than once. The period of time being described in Revelation is not only a time of God’s judgment of the wicked on planet earth, it is also a time known as the 70<sup>th</sup> week of Daniel that is meant to cause the people of Israel to turn back to Him in faith, repentance and obedience. The first four seal judgments of that period are identified as war (the sword), famine, death due to evil creatures and pestilence.

Rev. 6:3 And when he had opened the second seal, I heard the second beast say, Come and see.

Rev. 6:4 And there went out another horse *that was* red: and *power* was given to him that sat thereon to take peace from the earth, and that they should kill one another: and there was given unto him a great sword.

Rev. 6:5 And when he had opened the third seal, I heard the third beast say, Come and see. And I beheld, and lo a black horse; and he that sat on him had a pair of balances in his hand.

Rev. 6:6 And I heard a voice in the midst of the four beasts say, A measure of wheat for a penny, and three measures of barley for a penny; and *see* thou hurt not the oil and the wine.

Rev. 6:7 And when he had opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth beast say, Come and see.

Rev. 6:8 And I looked, and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him. And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth.

I’m not sure why these four are considered as a group separate from other acts of nature, such as earthquakes, hail, floods, etc. Maybe it is because these particular judgments are more directly influenced by the actions of man toward each other and the creation. In other words, men are reaping the results of their actions. This would tie in more directly with the thoughts presented in verses 4-5 above and the verses from Proverbs.

(10/12) These last few verses are very clear in declaring that God uses things that we would identify as natural causes in judgment and /or for refining purposes among those that are His. If people were more familiar with God’s word, they might be more willing to recognize God’s hand at work in “natural” disasters.

**Ezek. 14:22** Yet, behold, therein shall be left a remnant that shall be brought forth, *both* sons and daughters: behold, they shall come forth unto you, and ye shall see their way and their doings: and ye shall be comforted concerning the evil that I have brought upon Jerusalem, *even* concerning all that I have brought upon it.

**Ezek. 14:23 And they shall comfort you, when ye see their ways and their doings: and ye shall know that I have not done without cause all that I have done in it, saith the Lord GOD.**

No matter how wicked the people become, the Lord will be faithful to preserve a remnant in honor of His covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. This remnant from Jerusalem will “come forth unto you,” in other words, they will be brought to Babylon to join them in captivity. When the people already there observe the actions of this coming remnant, they will understand that God’s judgment was righteous and just. They are deserving of God’s judgment.

Interestingly, it is a comfort when we are able to understand God’s actions, when the reason for His action is clear. It’s when we don’t understand, that our faith is most tried. God doesn’t ever owe us an explanation for how and why He acts or what He permits. It is the times that He does give us the explanation that are to encourage us and carry us through the times that we don’t understand. Because He has revealed Himself as Faithful, Loving and Righteous, we should have confidence in Who He Is. He is never changing; always the same. Those who hope in Him will never be disappointed.

Mal. 3:6 For I *am* the LORD, I change not...

James 1:17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.

Joel 2:27 And ye shall know that I *am* in the midst of Israel, and *that I am* the LORD your God, and none else: and my people shall never be ashamed.