EZEKIEL

Chapter 14

*Idolaters Condemned*

**Some of the elders of Israel came to me and sat down in front of me.  2 Then the word of the LORD came to me:  3 “Son of man, these men have set up idols in their hearts and put wicked stumbling blocks before their faces. Should I let them inquire of me at all?  4 Therefore speak to them and tell them, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: When any Israelite sets up idols in his heart and puts a wicked stumbling block before his face and then goes to a prophet, I the LORD will answer him myself in keeping with his great idolatry.  5 I will do this to recapture the hearts of the people of Israel, who have all deserted me for their idols.’ 6 “Therefore say to the house of Israel, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Repent! Turn from your idols and renounce all your detestable practices! 7 ”‘When any Israelite or any alien living in Israel separates himself from me and sets up idols in his heart and puts a wicked stumbling block before his face and then goes to a prophet to inquire of me, I the LORD will answer him myself.  8 I will set my face against that man and make him an example and a byword. I will cut him off from my people. Then you will know that I am the LORD. 9 ”‘And if the prophet is enticed to utter a prophecy, I the LORD have enticed that prophet, and I will stretch out my hand against him and destroy him from among my people Israel.  10 They will bear their guilt—the prophet will be as guilty as the one who consults him.  11 Then the people of Israel will no longer stray from me, nor will they defile themselves anymore with all their sins. They will be my people, and I will be their God, declares the Sovereign LORD.’”**

As noted earlier, 14:1–11 has affinities with chapter 13 since it too discusses abuses of prophecy. Probably the reason for the chapter division at 14:1 is that the first section of the chapter (14:1–11) is addressed to the elders who came to the prophet (cf. the chapter division at 8:1, where elders have come to Ezekiel). While 14:1–8 concerns hypocrites who inquire of a true prophet, 14:9–11 addresses false prophecy, and so it is most similar to chapter 13, which was about false prophets and prophetesses. (CC)

In form and style, however, chapter 14 differs markedly from chapter 13. This chapter is usually described as reminiscent of case law (laws of casuistry) in the Torah and hence “quasi-legal” or the like. If we can hear the label without immediately thinking “legalism,” canon law would be the ecclesiastical counterpart, remembering that Israel was a theocracy and hence was both church and state at the same time. Casuistic laws predominate in the so-called “Book of the Covenant” (Ex 20:22–23:19), but they also appear throughout the legal portions of the Pentateuch. In form as well as particulars of vocabulary, Ezek 14:1–11 has much in common with Leviticus 17, the first chapter of the so-called “Holiness Code” (Leviticus 17–26), which, in general, has had a pronounced effect on the writing style and thought of Ezekiel, a priest (Ezek 1:3). (CC)

Typically the casuistic law form speaks hypothetically in the third person, for example, “If/when a man …” Usually the case under discussion forms the protasis, introduced by a conjunction such as כִּי (14:9, 13), אוֹ (14:17, 19), or אִם, each of which might be translated as “when,” “if,” or “or” depending on the context. Then follows an apodosis describing the consequences. As this chapter will illustrate, however, there may be many variations on this basic form. (CC)

The chapter contains four cases of casuistry, arranged in two pairs.

     I.     Cases involving prophecy (14:1–11)

      A.     When an idolater inquires of Yahweh (14:1–8)

      B.     When a prophet is misled (14:9–11)

      II.     When Yahweh sends his four judgments on a land (14:12–23)

      A.     If Noah, Daniel, and Job were in the land (14:12–20)

      B.     How much worse it will be for Jerusalem (14:21–23)

**14:1** *elders of Israel.* Apparently interchangeable with “elders of Judah” (see note on 8:1). (CSB)

In contrast to chapter 8, where a similar delegation had come to Ezekiel’s house, the group here is not called “the elders of Judah” (8:1) but “men from the elders of Israel” (14:1). The change is probably deliberate: “Israel” is the proper term for the theocracy, and case laws such as those in this chapter are stipulations of God for his kingdom. This accent is confirmed by the prominence of “Israel” a total of eight times in 14:1–11 (including “house of Israel” five times and “my people Israel” in 14:9). (CC)

We are not told explicitly why these elders had come. When we meet them again in 20:1, Ezekiel specifies that they came לִדְרֹ֣שׁ אֶת־יְהוָ֑ה, “to consult/inquire of Yahweh.” That vocabulary will also be used in chapter 14 (רָּרַשׁ, “consult/inquire,” in 14:3, 7, 10). Therefore we may assume that the elders had asked some question, which is not recorded. That the elders were awaiting an answer is probably indicated by the statement that they “sat down in front of” Ezekiel (14:1). Other uses of that phrase seem to imply some sort of official audience or meeting (so in 2 Ki 4:38; 6:32; cf. Num 22:8). (CC)

**14:3** *idols.* See note on 6:4 – (The Hebrew for this word is a derisive term (lit. “dung pellets”), used especially by Ezekiel (38 times, as opposed to only 9 times elsewhere in the OT). (CSB)

*inquire.* A technical term for seeking an oracle from a prophet (see 2Ki 1:16; 3:11; 8:8). (CSB)

The reason why Yahweh does not answer their question emerges: God has read their minds and sees that their hearts are still full of idolatrous thoughts; their faith is at least partially in their fecal deities. We are not told whether these were old false gods they had brought along (at least in their hearts) from Jerusalem or new, syncretistic deities adopted from their Babylonian milieu, but that is really beside the point. (CC)

The implied answer to the rhetorical question is obviously negative: with their hearts still attached to other gods, Yahweh cannot and will not hear their prayer or respond to their inquiry. Yahweh rebukes the presumptiveness of the elders who think otherwise by referring to them rather disdainfully as “these men.” They may be elders of Israel, but they are not sons of Israel in its theological sense. (CC)

Ezek 14:3 is obviously addressed to Ezekiel alone, and without the address to him as “son of man,” it could pass for Yahweh’s own soliloquy. The prophet has become, as it were, Yahweh’s confidant as Yahweh considers how he shall respond, if at all, to such seekers. (CC)

**14:4** *I the Lord will answer him myself.* The punishment for idolatry was death (Dt 13:6–18). (CSB)

Yahweh now directs Ezekiel to answer the elders for him, as indicated by the citation formula, delayed until now: “thus says the Lord Yahweh.” The prophet is to speak using the casuistic law form of the Torah (see especially Leviticus 17), implicitly invoking its authority to emphasize his response. The use of legal language transforms the scene into that of a suit against those who would inquire of Yahweh. They must answer to him, not he to them. (CC)

**14:5** The real problem is in the straying hearts of the elders and of the people they represent. Human laws cannot adjudicate what is in people’s hearts, but God’s laws do, for example, “you shall not covet” (Ex 20:17). See also Jesus’ explication of the Decalogue in terms of what is in the heart in Matthew 5–6. Only God knows the content of the heart. Yahweh speaks his answer to the idolater through his prophet, and the answer echoes the case laws in the Torah. The prophetic Word exposes the deities in the idolaters’ hearts so that God “may catch the house of Israel by what is in their heart.” They must be caught red-handed, as it were, for the people to see that God is just and fair, and that their sin is not hidden from him. God’s Law in the deeper, theological sense is operative. (CC)

**14:6** *Repent!* First of three calls for repentance from Ezekiel, who elsewhere proclaims inescapable judgment (see 18:30; 33:11). (CSB)

The transitional לָכֵן (“therefore”) introduces the second announcement of judgment that leads initially into an urgent call to repentance. Logically, it follows from 14:5b: because “all of them have alienated themselves” from the true God, they must be reconciled with him again. The urgency is expressed by a threefold repetition of שׁוּב, a common verb for “repent” or “return [to God].” The Qal imperative, “repent,” is followed by two Hiphil imperatives, “turn away” from the idols. These imperatives underscore how deliberative an action the people’s repentance must be, and one directly antithetical to their posture described in 14:3–5. (CC)

Superficially, this language poses theological difficulties. All descendants of Adam are by nature “dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph 2:1) and cannot by themselves repent, turn away from their idols, and turn back to God and thus live. God, working through his Word and Sacraments, raises the spiritually dead to life. For an Israelite, that vivifying work normally began with circumcision on the eighth day, just as for a NT believer it would begin with Baptism. Yet in some cases Israelites first heard God’s Word, which led to their circumcision as adults, just as the NT narrates conversion through hearing the Gospel, which then led to Baptism into Christ. (CC)

People do not of their own volition “make decisions for Christ” or decide to be “born again”; only God the Holy Spirit can move people to repent and create in their hearts faith in God, the only Savior. Yet the Scriptures (both the OT and NT) often issue calls for repentance and faith. Perhaps the apparent contradiction is best resolved by thinking of “two languages,” that of our own limited, subjective experience or consciousness, and that of God himself. In this, as in many other respects, it is part of God’s gracious condescension that he deigns to speak to us in language we can understand. The instructed and regenerate Christian knows that his experience is not a reliable basis for understanding what and how the Holy Spirit works within him; God’s Word gives the trustworthy and accurate revelation of how conversion takes place. (CC)

One might also perceive a problem in the immediate context because Yahweh’s reply might be taken to contradict his rhetorical question in 14:3, “Should I let them consult me at all?” The implied negative answer to that question suggests that he would refuse to answer the apostate elders’ inquiry, but now he rebukes the people (which is the kind of “answer” he promises in 14:4, 7). His reproof through the prophet might also be taken as a contradiction of his explanation of the reason for the prophet’s speechlessness: “you will not be to them a man who reproves” (3:26). The solution to these apparent contradictions lies in the fact that there is both Law and Gospel in the situation. God is reminding Israel of its own responsibility for its faithlessness (Law), but his prophetic call for his people to repent emphasizes that Israel’s willing faithfulness is his deepest desire, and by his gracious working at least a remnant will be saved (Gospel). Thus, he “opens the door just a crack to a new future for the immediate audience.” (CC)

**14:7** Yahweh here returns to the realities of the situation: no matter how fervently he may desire Israel’s repentance, he must deal with their present apostasy. To alienate themselves from him and then to inquire of him is an affront. Therefore, he will “answer” the apostates, but not in any way they hope. His rejoinder may not necessarily be verbal. Like ἀποκρίνομαι (“answer”) in the NT (e.g., Mt 11:25; 17:4), the Hebrew עָנָה (“answer”) does not have to be a direct reply to a prior question; often it implies some kind of response (verbal or otherwise) to a situation. God declares, “I, Yahweh, will give an answer to him myself [בִּֽי],” that is, in his own way, in accordance with his own nature, and directly, without any intermediary. The next verse spells out some details. (CC)

**14:8** Four aspects of God answering in judgment are given. First, “I will set my face against that man” obviously implies hostility. This is a stronger expression than the so-called hostile orientation formula, “Behold, I am against (you) …” The expression here must be understood as an action prophecy like previous ones where Ezekiel, representing Yahweh, was to “direct” or “set” his “face” toward the model of Jerusalem (4:3, 7) and Israel’s mountains (6:2) and prophesy against them. Here Yahweh’s hostile reaction corresponds to the idolatry of the people who “put their iniquitous stumbling block in front of their faces” (14:3; similarly 14:4, 7). The hostile sense of the clause contrasts with other OT idioms that describe God looking with favor upon his people. (CC)

Second, Yahweh will make them a “sign” (אוֹת). This word is often loaded (see the textual notes and commentary on 4:3). Here it apparently means “warning” or “lesson.” Similarly, Aaron’s sprouted rod was to be preserved as a “sign” (אוֹת) to the rebels that the house of Levi was the elected one (Num 17:10). In this instance, the typological import that the word often carries is not present, but such a construal would be defensible: the judgment against such an apostate is a type of the judgment against apostate humanity that Christ suffered vicariously on the cross, and also a type of the everlasting judgment that God will administer on the Last Day upon all sinners who would presume upon God’s grace without repentance (contrition and faith in Christ). (CC)

Third, partly parallel to “sign” (אוֹת) is “byword” (מָשָׁל). The name of that Israelite would become a shorthand for anyone who had deservedly borne God’s judgment. Within the Bible, “Sodom” and “Babylon’ are examples of place names that have become infamous for the sinful behavior they typified and proverbial for the judgment God poured out on them. Likewise, “Judas” typifies betrayal of Christ and eternal perdition. (CC)

The fourth and climactic aspect of judgment is Yahweh’s declaration, “I will cut him off from among my people.” Similar statements about an offender being “cut off from his kinsmen” (e.g., Gen 17:14; Ex 31:14; Lev 7:20–21) are common in the Pentateuch, and the passive voice (Niphal of כָּרַת) usually has the implication of divine agency. In Lev 17:10 and 20:3, 5–6 we find very close parallels to the formulation of the idiom here: Yahweh uses the active verb (Hiphil of כָּרַת), “I will cut him off,” and the singular עַם, “from the midst of his people,” instead of the more common plural (“kinsmen”). These are the only verses in the Torah where God uses the active verb in this idiom. The offenses are all in contexts of idolatry and include the eating of blood (Lev 17:10), the sacrifice of children to Molech (Lev 20:3, 5), and the use of mediums or occult practices (Lev 20:6). Some of these offenses would be secret or outside the jurisdiction of human tribunals; Lev 20:4–5 deals with a situation in which an idolater who sacrifices his child(ren) to Molech is not prosecuted or punished by any human authority. Hence that resembles the contemporary situation with abortion, which is tolerated in many modern societies, but which nonetheless is the murder of children, and whose practitioners will be judged by God. (CC)

Ezek 14:8, like many of the Torah verses, does not state exactly how the offender would be cut off, but “from among my people” (and “from his kinsmen” in many Torah passages) suggests that, at the very least, “excommunication” (to use the Christian counterpart) was involved. Sometimes the context suggests something even stronger, such as these parallels: “I will destroy him from among my people Israel” (Ezek 14:9). The one who sacrifices his child to Molech “shall certainly be put to death. The people of the land shall stone him with stones” (Lev 20:2). “I will exterminate that person from the midst of his people” (Lev 23:30). In all these cases, God’s judgment has an eschatological dimension. Whether physical (capital punishment administered by Israel) or purely spiritual (excommunication in Israel or the church), the divine judgment executed during this life portends the eternal judgment and damnation on the Last Day. However, excommunication has the goal that the offender may be brought to repentance, be restored to communion with the church, and so “be saved on the Day of the Lord” (1 Cor 5:4–5). (CC)

Against such a backdrop, the recognition formula, “then you will know that I am Yahweh” (Ezek 14:8), is like the tolling of a bell that takes on a terrible urgency. (CC)

**14:9** *enticed.* Related to the divine hardening (3:20; cf. 1Ki 22:19–23). (CSB)

Ezekiel here moves on to a second case about prophecy that is related to the previous ruling about two-faced “seekers” (14:1–8), whom Yahweh refuses to answer through a (true) prophet, since he will answer them directly in judgment. In 14:9–11 the question is what to do “if a prophet is misled and utters a prophecy,” that is, if a (false) prophet *does* give an answer to such idolatrous petitioners. (CC)

The textual notes on 14:9 observed that the passive verb translated “misled” leaves open what that prophet’s motives might be. He might, indeed, be simply venal, or he might be trying to capitalize on the people’s fears by proclaiming a phony peace (cf. 13:10). Out of ordinary human weakness, he may have simply allowed himself to be flattered into believing that he does indeed speak God’s word. The “word” might not even have been an oracle of his own invention or a false prophecy “inspired” in him by an evil spirit (e.g., 1 Ki 22:19–23). Perhaps he merely repeats what he heard another would-be prophet say or articulates the (spoken or unspoken) hopes of the people. (CC)

Regardless of the source or motives , the spoken “prophecy” is the wrong word for the occasion. It is another “gospel” when “the Law” and “the Gospel” were required. It may be anything that, instead of requiring repentance and instilling faith, simply confirmed the sinner in his self-righteous security. Eichrodt summarizes quite nicely: such a “prophet” “lets himself be induced by the wish to please or by a calculated compromise … treating his client’s deadly crime as if it were a venial weakness.” (CC)

The situation described in the protasis is an all-too-familiar one throughout the history of the church every bit as much as throughout the history of Israel. Every conscientious pastor is well aware of the constant temptation to say and do what the people will like (and hence what will bring him praise and promotion), and not to risk losing prospects or members by proclaiming “the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27). While God’s Law is perennially offensive, it can be made to sound appealing in the form of moralism or certain kinds of legalism, but nothing is so offensive to human pride as the scandal of the cross—Christ crucified (see, e.g., 1 Cor 1:18–31). (CC)

**14:10** As Yahweh will “cut off” (14:8; cf. 14:13, 17, 19, 21) the idolater who inquires of the false prophet, so he will also “destroy” the “prophet” who “is misled and utters a prophecy” (14:9). “The punishment of the inquirer will be like the punishment of the prophet” (14:10) because the prophet has allowed himself to be an accomplice of the same unfaithfulness as the idolatrous client. Also in Lev 19:8 and 20:17, the excommunication formula (“that person/they shall be cut off”) is accompanied by “he shall bear his iniquity/punishment,” a clause that “implies certain retribution and has an eschatological dimension.” The noun עָוֹן can refer either to “iniquity” or to “punishment” for it, but in these passages, taken in the context of all Scripture, the emphasis is more on the eschatological “punishment” that both the idolater and the false prophet will bear throughout eternity (unless they repent before Judgment Day) than on their “iniquity” committed during earthly life. (CC)

**14:11** The long diatribe (12:21–14:11) against false prophets and the abuse of true prophets ends on a beautiful note of Gospel. Weal following woe is a pattern we have noted before in Ezekiel and will note again. Yahweh has no pleasure in the death of the wicked (18:23, a theme that chapter 18 will consider at length). Two “never again” statements will be followed by a positive one. The two “never again” statements, “so that the house of Israel will never again stray … and they will never again defile themselves,” indicate that Yahweh is speaking of the realm of the eschatological, when we believers will no longer be *simul iustus et peccator* (“sinner and saint simultaneously”), but only *iustus* (saints in glory), risen bodily with Christ and beyond the present estate of temptation, sin, and death. (CC)

First, the redeemed will no longer “stray” like sheep (Is 53:6), constantly distracted by other gods and false gospels. Preachers who cater to our sinful, selfish desires will no longer receive a hearing. The Hebrew has “stray from [following] after me [מֵאַֽחֲרַ֔י],” which evokes not only the picture of forsaking the Good Shepherd, but more specifically of forsaking the marriage covenant, anticipating the covenant language at the end of the verse. The same combination of prepositions is used in Hos 1:2, where Yahweh declares, “The land greatly whores [זָנָה] from after Yahweh [מֵֽאַחֲרֵ֖י יְהוָֽה],” that is, goes a-whoring and so no longer follows after him. Hos 4:12 (literally, “a spirit of whoredom has caused them to stray, and they have whored from under their God”) uses a similar prepositional phrase with זָנָה, “to whore,” and the same verb תָּעָה, “to stray,” as in Ezek 14:11. Ps 106:39 (literally, “they became defiled by their works, and they whored with their deeds”) combinesזָנָה , “to whore,” with the same verb טָמֵא, “to be defiled,” as in Ezek 14:11. (CC)

Second, the verb טָמֵא in “they will never again *defile* *themselves* with all their rebellious actions” is common in Leviticus (see the textual note) and reflects Ezekiel’s priestly background (1:3). By his language in chapter 14, Ezekiel is giving his people a new Torah, a new covenant that will, in God’s good time, be written on their hearts (the “new covenant/testament” prophesied in Jer 31:31–34). Following the verb “defile themselves” (טָמֵא) comes the strong noun “rebellion” (פֶּשַׁע, Ezek 14:11), often used of political insurrection against human lords to whom fealty had been sworn, but here it is against the Lord of life himself. No sins are mere peccadilloes, and especially not sexual ones, which involve the body, as our membership in the body of Christ also does (1 Cor 6:15–20). (CC)

Finally comes the positive promise, expressed in the words of the classical covenant formula, with its roots in the language of marriage and adoption (see Ezek 16:8): “They will be my people, and I will be their God” (see the commentary on 11:20, the first passage where Ezekiel employs that formula). It encompasses the full, undiluted dimensions of what it means to have Yahweh (that is, Jesus!) as our God, and, in turn, the full depths of the fact that we have been adopted as *his* people and are joined more closely to him than in Eden: “YHWH and the people are once again joined, as at the beginning, by a bond of mutual allegiance.” (CC)

The closing signatory formula (“says the Lord Yahweh”) highlights the promise further. (CC)

*Judgment Inescapable*

**12 The word of the LORD came to me:  13 “Son of man, if a country sins against me by being unfaithful and I stretch out my hand against it to cut off its food supply and send famine upon it and kill its men and their animals,  14 even if these three men—Noah, Daniel and Job—were in it, they could save only themselves by their righteousness, declares the Sovereign LORD. 15 “Or if I send wild beasts through that country and they leave it childless and it becomes desolate so that no one can pass through it because of the beasts,  16 as surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, even if these three men were in it, they could not save their own sons or daughters. They alone would be saved, but the land would be desolate. 17 “Or if I bring a sword against that country and say, ‘Let the sword pass throughout the land,’ and I kill its men and their animals,  18 as surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, even if these three men were in it, they could not save their own sons or daughters. They alone would be saved. 19 “Or if I send a plague into that land and pour out my wrath upon it through bloodshed, killing its men and their animals,  20 as surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, even if Noah, Daniel and Job were in it, they could save neither son nor daughter. They would save only themselves by their righteousness. 21 “For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: How much worse will it be when I send against Jerusalem my four dreadful judgments—sword and famine and wild beasts and plague—to kill its men and their animals!  22 Yet there will be some survivors—sons and daughters who will be brought out of it. They will come to you, and when you see their conduct and their actions, you will be consoled regarding the disaster I have brought upon Jerusalem—every disaster I have brought upon it.  23 You will be consoled when you see their conduct and their actions, for you will know that I have done nothing in it without cause, declares the Sovereign LORD.”**

**14:13** The case-law pattern followed in all four examples is established immediately. All four cases are “when a land sins against me by faithlessly doing infidelity” (14:13), although that precipitating cause of the divine judgment is stated only here, at the beginning of the first case. The hypothetical land could be any land. Although the reader would readily guess that the prophet has the land of Israel in mind, that is not specified here. However, elsewhere in the OT the cognate accusative phrase מָעַל מַעַל (“faithlessly doing infidelity”) always has an Israelite subject. Since the phrase refers not only to faithless behavior in general, but specifically to violations of things holy to Yahweh, it technically can be used only of offenders who at least nominally confess Yahweh (as clearly is the case in the preceding context, 14:1–11). When Yahweh applies the passage (14:12–20) later in 14:21–23, it is specifically to Jerusalem and the Israelites. Hence, the heinous perfidy implied by the phrase hangs over the rest of the chapter. (CC)

Yahweh’s reaction to the infidelity is first described in a general phrase that is then illustrated in the four more specific scenarios that follow. He describes his first reaction to the infidelity as “I stretch out my hand against” the land. The same phraseology was in 6:14 (against the nation) and 14:9 (against a false prophet) and will recur later. This phraseology is especially common in the exodus narrative, where Yahweh (or his agents, Moses and/or Aaron) stretched out his hand against Egypt in the form of the ten plagues and to enable Israel to cross the Red Sea, in which the Egyptians drowned. Here Yahweh’s “hand” of judgment results in famine, and the passage may imply that his hand is also manifest in the three other specific scenarios that will follow. Likewise, the general language of famine and breaking the staff of bread was met earlier in Ezek 5:16, echoing the curse in Lev 26:26 for breaking the covenant. (CC)

**14:14, 20** *Noah, Daniel and Job.* Three ancient men of renown, selected because of their proverbial righteousness. As the NIV text note indicates, another Daniel may be referred to (Ugaritic literature speaks of an honored “Danel”; see chart on “Ancient Texts Relating to the OT”), since the Biblical Daniel’s righteousness probably had not become proverbial so soon (Daniel and Ezekiel were contemporaries; see Da 1:1). If the Biblical Daniel is meant, what he shared in common with Noah and Job was not only righteousness but also deliverance (part of Ezekiel’s emphasis). (CSB)

**14:15-16** The second hypothetical judgment is wild animals that would “bereave” the land, that is, leave it childless and a barren “desolation” (repeated in both 14:15 and 14:16 for emphasis). The phrase “these three men” undoubtedly refers to the three named in 14:14, 20. All ten of Job’s first children were killed (Job 1:13–19) despite their father’s righteousness and his sacrifices on their behalf (Job 1:1–5). Ezekiel may be implying that Jerusalem’s fate will be like that of Job’s first children, and not like those of Noah, whose sons and daughters-in-law were saved along with him (Genesis 6–9). (We have no information about a possible family of canonical Daniel.) (CC)

The major point is that “they alone [the three paragons of righteousness] would be saved” (14:16), which expresses with a passive verb (Niphal of נָצַל) the same conclusion expressed in 14:14 with an active verb, “they … would save [only] their own souls” (the Piel of נָצַל with נֶפֶשׁ as the object). (CC)

**14:17-20** Two more examples each drive home the same point as the previous two: the “righteousness” of the three men will avail to save nobody but themselves. (CC)

**14:20** *neither son nor daughter.* When God comes in judgment against a nation or people, no one can count on another’s righteousness—not even that of his parents—to deliver him. (CSB)

**14:21** *my four dreadful judgments.* See note on 1:5 – (“Four,” which stands for completeness (cf. the four directions in Ge 13:14 and the four quarters of the earth in Isa 11:12), is used often in this chapter—and over 40 times in the book. The living creatures, called “cherubim” in ch. 10, are throne attendants, here (see v. 10) representing God’s creation: “man,” God’s ordained ruler of creation (see Ge 1:26–28; Ps 8); “lion,” the strongest of the wild beasts; “ox,” the most powerful of the domesticated animals; “eagle,” the mightiest of the birds. These four creatures appear again in Rev 4:7 and often are seen in the paintings and sculpture of the Middle Ages, where they represent the four Gospels.) (CSB)

*sword and famine and wild beasts and plague.* Cf. the “four horsemen of the Apocalypse” (see Rev 6:1–8, and especially Rev 6:8). (CSB)

The chapter moves towards its climax with this verse: “How much worse will it be when I send my four terrible judgments … upon Jerusalem!” The symbolism of the numeral four may signify the completeness and universality of the judgment, as anticipated by, for example, “the end has come upon the *four* corners of the earth” (7:2). (CC)

The four calamities, “sword, famine, wild beasts, and plague” (14:21), appear in a different order than in the preceding verses (famine, wild animals, sword, and plague in 14:13–19), than in 5:16–17, and than in the archetype, the curses in Lev 26:21–26 for breaking the covenant. That no two listings have the same order indicates that the exact sequence has no significance. See also the four horsemen of the apocalypse (Rev 6:1–8) and the four means “to kill with sword and with famine and with death and by the beasts of the earth” (Rev 6:8; most English translations render “death” by “pestilence” or “plague”). (CC)

As already in Ezek 5:10, 15 and 11:9, and again later (16:41), Ezekiel describes the impending disasters as שְׁפָטִים, “judgments,” not just in the negative sense of punishments, but primarily in the sense of juridical decisions of the heavenly Judge, who determines history. If any one of the judgments would be catastrophic and “cut off … man and beast” (14:13, 17, 19), how much more when Yahweh sends all four upon Jerusalem will they “cut off … man and beast” (14:21). (CC)

**14:23** *You.* Plural; i.e., the exiles in Babylon. (CSB)

*will be consoled.* When the exiles see the wickedness of those brought to Babylon from Jerusalem, they will know that God’s judgment on the city was just. (CSB)

Since not even Noah, Daniel, and Job could save sons and daughters from any one of the four judgments (14:12–20), how much more improbable would it be for the apostate Israelites to save sons and daughters when Yahweh sends all four (14:21). How surprising it is, then, that the final two verses promise “a group of survivors” consisting of “those sons and daughters who will be brought out” (14:22). The surprise is expressed in the text by הִנֵּה (“behold”) at the beginning of two of the clauses in 14:22. Critics tend to eliminate 14:22–23 by regarding it as a later addition, but the surprise is not totally unexpected, since in earlier passages too Ezekiel had promised a remnant, and he will again later. (CC)