

EZEKIEL

Chapter 14

Idolatrous Elders Condemned

Then certain of the elders of Israel came to me and sat before me. 2 And the word of the LORD came to me: 3 “Son of man, these men have taken their idols into their hearts, and set the stumbling block of their iniquity before their faces. Should I indeed let myself be consulted by them? 4 Therefore speak to them and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: Any one of the house of Israel who takes his idols into his heart and sets the stumbling block of his iniquity before his face, and yet comes to the prophet, I the LORD will answer him as he comes with the multitude of his idols, 5 that I may lay hold of the hearts of the house of Israel, who are all estranged from me through their idols. 6 “Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord GOD: Repent and turn away from your idols, and turn away your faces from all your abominations. 7 For any one of the house of Israel, or of the strangers who sojourn in Israel, who separates himself from me, taking his idols into his heart and putting the stumbling block of his iniquity before his face, and yet comes to a prophet to consult me through him, I the LORD will answer him myself. 8 And I will set my face against that man; I will make him a sign and a byword and cut him off from the midst of my people, and you shall know that I am the LORD. 9 And if the prophet is deceived and speaks a word, I, the LORD, have deceived that prophet, and I will stretch out my hand against him and will destroy him from the midst of my people Israel. 10 And they shall bear their punishment—the punishment of the prophet and the punishment of the inquirer shall be alike— 11 that the house of Israel may no more go astray from me, nor defile themselves anymore with all their transgressions, but that they may be my people and I may be their God, declares the Lord GOD.”

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

The phrase suggests a smaller number and men in some religious position. Vv 3–5 indicate that they had come with a question which is not recorded. (TLSB)

sat before me. Awaiting an answer. (TLSB)

14:3 *idols.* 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)

The elders’ devotion to false gods is not superficial, but thoroughly internalized. (TLSB)

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

Idolatry is what had caused them to make the wrong decision and stumble. (TLSB)

before their faces. Indicates that it was no occasional error, but a god or faith that they constantly pursued. *consulted.* Semi-technical term for a petition or request of God. The Lord is under no obligation to hear prayers of those who worship other gods. (TLSB)

14:4–5 God will answer, but in the form of a lawsuit against the duplicity of those who are really expecting an answer from other gods. The Lord alone knows what is in human hearts; their insincerity is not hidden from Him. (TLSB)

14:4 *I the LORD will answer him.* 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)

Repetition (two forms of the same Hbr verb) and thus emphatic. The situation can change only if there is a change of heart. (TLSB)

14:7 *strangers who sojourn*. Probably refers to proselytes who had attached themselves to Israel. If these people joined the community in exile, they were probably no more sincere than most of the rest of the exiles. (TLSB)

14:8 *sign*. Visible warning or lesson. (TLSB)

byword. Proverbial representative of all who would presume upon God’s grace. (TLSB)

cut him off. Implies a counterpart of churchly excommunication and perhaps other divine punishment, even death. (TLSB)

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

Ezekiel here turns to a variant of the problem of two-faced seekers, a case where a false prophet answers them but tells them what they want to hear. More shocking is the Lord’s statement that He has done the deceiving. The Lord Himself acts to ensure the hypocrites’ well-deserved judgment. There are many parallels to this strange work (Is 28:21) of God (cf Ex 10:20, 27; 1Ki 22:20–22; Jer 20:7; Ezk 20:25–26). (TLSB)

stretch out My hand against him. Not in salvation, as with the exodus, but to destroy him. (TLSB)

14:11 *no more go astray ... defile ... transgressions*. When least expected, we have a beautiful note of God’s mercy. The purpose of God’s harsh judgment is to redeem the people from their errors. (TLSB)

be My people. Bonded with the Lord and living as His people. For Christians, this relationship began at our Baptism, but will not be complete until the second coming, when the fullness of the new covenant will be written on our hearts (Jer 31:31–34). (TLSB)

14:1–11 God does not answer the prayers of those who do not pray in His name, not even when false prophets claim to speak for Him. We are rejected because we first rejected Him, even if false preachers

have seduced us. The last verse of this section is a beautiful statement of the purpose of the Law—to convict and convince us of our unfaithfulness and bring us to repentance so that we may enjoy His salvation. • O Lord, be our God, and make us truly Your people, through the merits of Jesus Christ, Your Son. Amen. (TLSB)

Jerusalem Will Not Be Spared

12 And the word of the LORD came to me: 13 “Son of man, when a land sins against me by acting faithlessly, and I stretch out my hand against it and break its supply of bread and send famine upon it, and cut off from it man and beast, 14 even if these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they would deliver but their own lives by their righteousness, declares the Lord GOD. 15 “If I cause wild beasts to pass through the land, and they ravage it, and it be made desolate, so that no one may pass through because of the beasts, 16 even if these three men were in it, as I live, declares the Lord GOD, they would deliver neither sons nor daughters. They alone would be delivered, but the land would be desolate. 17 “Or if I bring a sword upon that land and say, Let a sword pass through the land, and I cut off from it man and beast, 18 though these three men were in it, as I live, declares the Lord GOD, they would deliver neither sons nor daughters, but they alone would be delivered. 19 “Or if I send a pestilence into that land and pour out my wrath upon it with blood, to cut off from it man and beast, 20 even if Noah, Daniel, and Job were in it, as I live, declares the Lord GOD, they would deliver neither son nor daughter. They would deliver but their own lives by their righteousness. 21 “For thus says the Lord GOD: How much more when I send upon Jerusalem my four disastrous acts of judgment, sword, famine, wild beasts, and pestilence, to cut off from it man and beast! 22 But behold, some survivors will be left in it, sons and daughters who will be brought out; behold, when they come out to you, and you see their ways and their deeds, you will be consoled for the disaster that I have brought upon Jerusalem, for all that I have brought upon it. 23 They will console you, when you see their ways and their deeds, and you shall know that I have not done without cause all that I have done in it, declares the Lord GOD.”

14:12–23 The theme is no longer false prophecy (12:21–14:11) but the main theme of chs 1–24: the inevitability of God’s judgment on Jerusalem. Four divine judgments (cf v 21) are discussed at some length; the first, famine, is mentioned in v 13 as punishment upon a land that acts faithlessly. (TLSB)

14:14, 20 *Noah, Daniel and Job.* Three ancient men of renown, selected because of their proverbial righteousness. another Daniel may be referred to (Ugaritic literature speaks of an honored “Danel”, 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)

Three paragons of righteousness. Noah lived in ancient times (during the flood). Job is not dated precisely in the Bible, but likely belongs to patriarchal times (see p 781). Daniel was Ezekiel’s close contemporary (see p 1394). Jer 15:1–3 speaks similarly, using Moses and Samuel as examples. (TLSB)

their righteousness. Would deliver only themselves. Transfer of merit is not possible. Cf 1Pt 3:19–20; 2Pt 2:5. Cyr: “Who was more righteous than Noah, who, when the earth was filled with sins, was alone found righteous on the earth? Who more glorious than Daniel? Who more strong for suffering martyrdom in firmness of faith, more happy in God’s condescension, who so many times, both when he was in conflict conquered, and, when he had conquered, lived on? Was any more ready in good works than Job, braver in temptations, more patient in sufferings, more submissive in his fear, more true in his faith?” (ANF 5:442). (TLSB)

14:14 No one else’s righteousness can be transferred to that land’s account and save it. Each person must personally believe and answer to God. (TLSB)

14:15–16 God would use judgment through an invasion by wild animals, depopulating the land. (TLSB)

14:17 *sword*. Represents war. (TLSB)

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 *How much more*. Righteousness will not transfer (v 14). This will certainly still apply when God sends His judgments upon Jerusalem. (TLSB)

my four disastrous acts of judgments. “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)

14:22 *survivors ... when they come out to you*. Apparently captives who are marched into exile, where their parents are already. These random survivors have not been spared by anyone's righteousness. (TLSB)

consoled. Applies to parents who had been worrying about their children who were left behind in the first exile. (TLSB)

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

they will console you. 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)

Children will encourage their parents, as both groups will see that they had been guilty of the same depraved ways and deeds. God was just in destroying Jerusalem and leading a few into captivity. (TLSB)

not done without cause. They will realize that the Lord had acted appropriately, not in some fit of temper. (TLSB)

14:12–23 Using four vivid pictures, Ezekiel emphasizes that righteousness (faith and life) is not transferable from one person to the next. We should not think that salvation can come from any other human source, but only from the righteousness won by Christ on the cross. The exiles' concession that God does not punish without cause is described in vv 22–23. The Law was beginning to work, opening the door for repentance and faith. • Teach us, Lord how to regard the saints—not as sources of faith or merit for us, but as examples in fighting the good fight in Christ. Amen. (TLSB)