

Israel's Idolatrous Heart Revealed

Ezekiel 14

Ezekiel 14:1-11: "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."

Background Notes

While he was a captive in Babylon, Ezekiel was free to prophesy and minister to his fellow captives. His prophetic ministry to the people was done through signs, object lessons, visions, sermons, messages, and parables. In chapter 12 Ezekiel gave two signs that predicted the coming fall of Jerusalem: the sign of the baggage and tunneled wall, and the sign of the trembling hands. He followed up these two signs with a series of five messages, all dealing with the certainty of God's coming judgment. The first two messages are in the last section of Ezekiel 12. The third message, in Ezekiel 13, denounced the false prophets and prophetesses.

The fourth and fifth messages are in chapter 14, and they concern the certainty of the coming judgment on Judah and Jerusalem. The fourth message is in verses 1-11 and the fifth is in verses 12-23. Notice that each message is introduced with the phrase that we've seen before: "And the word of the Lord came to me..." Our two doctrinal points for this chapter will come from these two messages.

Doctrinal Points

1. An individual can pass the point of no return.

On the occasion of these two messages, the elders of the Jewish captives in Babylon came to Ezekiel's house, probably to ask if he had received any recent word from God about Jerusalem and the Temple of the Lord. These were the same elders who came to speak to Ezekiel at the beginning of chapter 8. Remember - at that time the Lord revealed a four-part vision about the idolatry and wickedness that was going on in the Temple area, and the consequent coming judgment. Many people would die, Jerusalem would be burned, the Temple would be destroyed, and God's glory would depart.

In chapter 14 these same elders were once again with Ezekiel, but something we did not know before was mentioned about them. God revealed to Ezekiel that these elders were involved in idolatry themselves! These were the men who should have been giving spiritual guidance to the people, but instead they were involved in idolatry.

These elders were not literally bowing down to images or worshiping the sun, as were many of the people in Jerusalem. Their idolatry was idolatry of the mind. They had idolatrous hearts, just like many people today. Look again at verse 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."*

God said that if they did not repent and turn away from this form of idolatry, they would be cut off with no chance of mercy. They had reached the point of no return. *"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"* (v8). Any false prophet who was misguiding these elders would also meet the same fate: *"The punishment of the prophet shall be the same as the punishment of the one who inquired"* (v10).

God was about to use these lost individuals as examples, to hopefully turn Israel around. Verse 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.*" In reference to God's judgment, an individual can come to a point of no return.

What was true in Ezekiel's day is true today. In Hebrews 6 a warning was given about unbelievers who had come close to receiving salvation, but then had fallen away. Hebrews 6:6 says that *it is impossible to renew them again to repentance*. Why? Because they had turned their backs on God, and a hardening process had taken place in their hearts and minds. They had reached the point of no return.

Romans 1 speaks of people who were so involved in gross idolatry and immorality that God gave them over to their sin. Why? They had reached the point of no return. That's the point of Ezekiel 14:9. The Lord was said to have "induced" the

false prophets to mislead the people. The Lord had allowed these false prophets to come under a deluding and demonic influence and thus mislead the people. Why? The reason is that these false prophets - and those who followed them - had turned away from God so far and so long that the Lord had given them over - they had reached the point of no return. An individual can pass the point of no return.

2. A nation can pass the point of no return.

Ezekiel 14:12-21: *"The word of the Lord came again to me, saying: ¹³"Son of man, when a land sins against Me by persistent unfaithfulness, I will stretch out My hand against it; I will cut off its supply of bread, send famine on it, and cut off man and beast from it. ¹⁴ Even if these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they would deliver only themselves by their righteousness," says the Lord God.*

¹⁵ "If I cause wild beasts to pass through the land, and they empty it, and make it so desolate that no man may pass through because of the beasts, ¹⁶ even though these three men were in it, as I live," says the Lord God, "they would deliver neither sons nor daughters; only they would be delivered, and the land would be desolate. ¹⁷ "Or if I bring a sword on that land, and say, 'Sword, go through the land,' and I cut off man and beast from it, ¹⁸ even though these three men were in it, as I live," says the Lord God, "they would deliver neither sons nor daughters, but only they themselves would be delivered.

¹⁹ "Or if I send a pestilence into that land and pour out My fury on it in blood, and cut off from it man and beast, ²⁰ even though Noah, Daniel, and Job were in it, as I live," says the Lord God, "they would deliver neither son nor daughter; they would deliver only themselves by their righteousness." ²¹ For thus says the Lord God: "How much more it shall be when I send My four severe judgments on Jerusalem—the sword and famine and wild beasts and pestilence—to cut off man and beast from it?"

These verses reveal that the nation had reached the point of no return – there was now no chance to avoid God's judgment. Even had righteous men like Noah, Daniel, and Job been living in Judah at that time, the nation would not be saved because they had reached the point of no return.

Some of the disobedient people of Judah thought they were safe because there were still some righteous people around – just as some people today think that they're safe when traveling by plane as long as some committed Christians are on the flight! However, the Lord declared that even if Noah, Daniel, and Job were living in Jerusalem, the city and nation would not be delivered - because they had reached the point of no return.

Although those righteous men would be delivered, they would not be able to save even their own sons and daughters because the nation was so ripe for judgment. In Genesis 18 God said that He would destroy Sodom if there were ten righteous people around - so in Ezekiel's time the situation in Jerusalem was even worse than that of Sodom!

God was about to judge the nation of Judah with famine (v13), wild beasts (v15), the sword (v17), and pestilence (v19). In each case, even the presence of Noah, Daniel, and Job would not stop God's judgment because the nation had passed the point of no return. Notice, by the way, that Daniel (who was living in Babylon at this time), had already attained a reputation for being a righteous man. What an example for us!

What was true for the nation of Judah is true for any nation. Notice that verse 13 says "a land" or "a country." So it was not only the nation of Judah that was in view here, but **any nation**. A nation can pass the point of no return regarding the judgment of God.

What about our own nation? Are we listening to God's wake-up calls that warn us of our sinful and idolatrous ways? A nation can pass the point of no return.

Practical Application

Don't become a negative "Exhibit A"!

Verses 22-23: *"Yet behold, there shall be left in it a remnant who will be brought out, both sons and daughters; surely they will come out to you, and you will see their ways and their doings. Then you will be comforted concerning the disaster that I have brought upon Jerusalem, all that I have brought upon it. ²³ And they will comfort you, when you see their ways and their doings; and you shall know that I have done nothing without cause that I have done in it," says the Lord God.*"

The term "Exhibit A" comes from courtroom language, when items called exhibits are presented to prove or disprove a person's guilt or innocence. In verse 22 the Lord said that there would be a remnant of Jewish people whose lives would be preserved when Jerusalem was destroyed. They would be brought as captives from Jerusalem to Babylon, and they would "comfort" or "console" the captives who were already in Babylon.

These people were not a "righteous remnant" preserved by God. No, these were God's "Exhibit A" - in a negative way! These captives would testify that the awful judgment that had been predicted to fall on Jerusalem had indeed come true. They would "console" the Jewish captives in Babylon for the loss of the city and the Temple in the sense that they would testify that God's judgment was just and righteous.

When God has to discipline a Christian for open and obvious sin - maybe with sickness, or problems, or sometimes even with death - he or she becomes an "Exhibit A" in a negative way. Other believers see that God means what He says about sin.

It's not a pleasant thought, but it is an important warning. Don't become a negative "Exhibit A"!