

The Visions of Ezekiel

Lesson 9

In the past two chapters, the LORD predicted that he would rain down doom on the *house of Israel* living in exile and in Jerusalem. He called it the *rebellious house of Israel*. Even though five years still remained until the destruction of the city of Jerusalem and the Temple in 586 BC, the LORD's proclamation through Ezekiel dealt with the current state of mind of the members of the tribes of Ephraim, Manasseh and Simeon in particular whose ancestors had escaped the fall of the Northern Kingdom of Israel in 722 BC by moving to Jerusalem in the fifteenth year of King Asa (2 Chronicles 15:1-10). Members of these tribes were influential in the life of the Prince/King Zedekiah and led him astray in his thinking as the ruler of the Southern Kingdom.

The report from Ezekiel was especially disturbing in many ways and it drew the attention some of the *elders of Israel*.

13. Ezekiel's Thirteenth Assignment from the LORD

a) Visit from the Elders of Israel

Eze 14:1 Then some elders of Israel came to me and sat down before me.

The day before, Ezekiel was surrounded in his home by the *elders of Judah*. On this day, the *elders of Israel* had come to sit before him in his own tent. They, too, had concerns about Ezekiel's words and actions of the past days concerning Israel.

b) Warning About the Elders of Israel

Eze 14:2a And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, Eze 14:3 "Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their hearts and have put right before their faces the stumbling block of their iniquity.

As soon as the *elders of Israel* entered Ezekiel's home and sat down, the LORD spoke to Ezekiel in order to warn him of the true intent of the hearts of these men. In the past lessons in this series we have concluded that the *northern exiles of Israel* were wicked in their hearts toward the LORD. We did that knowing that this passage was coming in the context of the book. Here we see the proof for what we have previously stated. These *elders of Israel* were not like their forefathers who had been saved from the destruction of the Northern Kingdom because they had *called upon the name of the LORD*. These descendants had strayed from the LORD in the past 131 years and returned to the evil that brought down the Northern Kingdom with the wrath of the LORD upon them more than a century before. What was the problem? Idols. Nothing in this world has ever infuriated the LORD more than the worship of idols, especially among the people that the LORD had chosen to be His people and the ultimate nation from which He would be birthed in human flesh to be the Savior of all mankind, the nation He personally addressed in her youth when He rescued her from Egypt, the nation He personally instructed at the foot of Mount Sinai concerning His *Ten Commandments*. What profit did an idol give to a person? Nothing but a "...**stumbling block of their...**" sin!

c) Question About the Elders of Israel

Eze 14:2a **Should I be consulted by them at all?**

Our English translators have been kind to the *elders of Israel* with the wording of this question. The original intent of the Hebrew is better translated “*Should I take the questions of such hypocrites as they are?*” After all, Proverbs 28:9 states, “He who turns away his ear from listening to the law, even his prayer is an abomination.” These *elders of Israel*, living in exile, had turned their ears away from the Law of the LORD and their prayers to their idols were “**an abomination.**” Nevertheless, these were the descendants of the righteous remnant of the Northern Kingdom and the LORD had chosen and charged Ezekiel with the purpose of striking the fear of the LORD in their hearts. To the question the LORD posed to Ezekiel, the answer was yes, the LORD would listen to their inquiry.

d) Message to the Elders of Israel

(1) First Comes the Idols

Eze 14:4a **"Therefore speak to them and tell them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Any man of the house of Israel who sets up his idols in his heart,**

The LORD knew the hearts of the *elders of Israel*. The LORD knew that they had placed an idol in their hearts in place of the LORD. Therefore, the LORD had a five-part message for Ezekiel to address to this group. *First come the idols!* Where? “**In his heart....**” The idols were not only on the high places, on the street corners, in the homes, but they were also dwelling in their hearts. A man can walk away from the high places, the streets and the homes, but he cannot walk away from his heart. He carries them everywhere he goes. They live within! They reign within! They rule within! How can carved pieces of stone, wood or metal become so important to the heart that they fill the heart to capacity? They are nothing but dumb, mute, inanimate carving of the imagination of man. First come the idols!

(2) Second Comes the Iniquity

Eze 14:4b **puts right before his face the stumbling block of his iniquity,**

Second comes the iniquity! The worship of the idol placed in one’s heart blinds the person to the point that he cannot see around him to determine where he is going. Therefore, this idol, this iniquity, this sin as it might better be called, causes him to stumble over the good and the bad. He misses the good and embraces the bad. We do not use the word *iniquity* in our everyday language, but we do use another word that means the same thing – *perverse*. It means *to turn away from that which is good to embrace that which is evil*. Second comes the perverse!

(3) Third Comes the Inquiry

Eze 14:4c **and then comes to the prophet, I the LORD will be brought to give him an answer in the matter in view of the multitude of his idols,** ^{Eze 14:5} **in order to lay hold of the hearts of the house of Israel who are estranged from Me through all their idols."**

Third comes the inquiry! The sinner always seeks to spew his sin in the face of the righteous! What had these men of the *elders of Israel in exile* done? They had marched right up to the prophet’s home and sat in the same place where the righteous had sat the day before. These men did not come in humility by any means; these men came to challenge Ezekiel’s messages. His messages were in direct opposition to their personal inspirations. They loved their idols. Their idols filled their hearts. The LORD knew that. These men had made a tactical mistake. They

arrived to attack the prophet but the LORD had prepared the prophet with a word that should cast away the idols from within their hearts.

(4) Fourth Comes the Invitation

Eze 14:6 "Therefore say to the house of Israel, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Repent and turn away from your idols and turn your faces away from all your abominations."

Fourth comes the invitation! The *elders of Israel* had to know these words were going to come through Ezekiel's lips straight from the mouth of the LORD. **"Repent and turn away from your idols"** and turn from your sins. These were not new words in Ezekiel's day; the LORD had used them throughout the centuries. They are not new words today; they are words that apply to all of us who love sin more than the LORD - **"Repent and turn away from your idols..."**

(a) His Warning Against the Idolaters

Eze 14:7 "For anyone of the house of Israel or of the immigrants who stay in Israel who separates himself from Me, sets up his idols in his heart, puts right before his face the stumbling block of his iniquity, and then comes to the prophet to inquire of Me for himself, I the LORD will be brought to answer him in My own person."

Why did the LORD give the invitation to these members of the *elders of Israel*? It was his warning to them as idolaters. It did not matter whether it was the *elders of Israel in exile* or the **"immigrants"** from the tribes of Ephraim, Manasseh or Simeon who had escaped the fall of the Northern Kingdom and found refuge in the Southern Kingdom during the days of King Asa; idolatry was an abomination against the LORD and when they gathered the gumption to question a true prophet about their sin, the LORD would answer them Personally! **"Repent and turn away from your idols..."**

(b) His Face Against the Idolaters

Eze 14:8 "I will set My face against that man and make him a sign and a proverb, and I will cut him off from among My people. So you will know that I am the LORD."

The LORD gave a *warning to these idolaters*, but He would always follow the warning with the punishment inflicted by seeing *His face*. It was and still is a dreadful thing to encounter the face of the LORD. Throughout Scripture *seeking the face of the LORD* always represents the deserved punishment by the Almighty for sin. This passage is no different.

When Solomon prayed at the dedication of the Temple, the LORD heard him; that night He said to Solomon the following as a warning.

2 Chronicles 7:¹² Then the LORD appeared to Solomon at night and said to him, "I have heard your prayer and have chosen this place for Myself as a house of sacrifice. ¹³ "If I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or if I command the locust to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among My people, ¹⁴ and My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

Even in this favorite passage of many, the reference to the words **"seek My face"** is rarely joined to its previous partner words in the passage, **"if I send pestilence among My people"** – the *angel of death*. It is also rarely joined to the partner words that follow, **"and turn from their wicked ways..."** If that which comes before and that which comes after are dealing with sin, surely to *seek the face of the LORD* also dealt with sin. How? By acknowledging the sin and being willing to accept the punishment of the LORD. He said to Moses, who wanted to see His face, "You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!" (Exodus 33:20). The LORD does not change, and He had not changed with his words to Solomon or to these *elders of Israel*.

When the LORD sets His face against a person, the LORD plans a deathly punishment – cutting him off from the LORD and His people.

(5) Fifth Comes the Initiator
(a) Doom of the False Prophet

Eze 14:9 "But if the prophet is prevailed upon to speak a word, it is I, the LORD, who have prevailed upon that prophet, and I will stretch out My hand against him and destroy him from among My people Israel.

Finally, *fifth comes the initiator!* With the coming of the sinners, the prophets would soon follow in tow. Never think that a so-called prophet of the people would not be following at the heels of a popular sin. A so-called religious man could always be found to bless the event – the marriage of two women, the marriage of two men, both proclaimed by the LORD to be an abomination. Nevertheless, a so-called prophet can always be found and prevailed upon to speak a blessed word in the midst of the detestable things in the eyes of the LORD. The warning to the initiator, the so-called prophet - the LORD intends destroy you! The doom of the false prophet would always come, and it would be an eternal doom at that.

(b) Punishment of the False Prophet

Eze 14:10 "They will bear *the punishment of their iniquity*; as the iniquity of the inquirer is, so the iniquity of the prophet will be,

The *doom of the false prophet* will be followed by the *punishment of the false prophet*. The prophet may never actually have participated in the sin of the person, but if he blessed it, he was guilty of it in the eyes of the LORD. The one who goes to hell's fire would be joined there by the false prophet who saw no wrong in it.

(c) Retrieved from the False Prophet

Eze 14:11 in order that the house of Israel may no longer stray from Me and no longer defile themselves with all their transgressions. Thus they will be My people, and I shall be their God," declares the Lord GOD."

Why was the LORD willing to answer these *elders of the house of Israel* who had marched into Ezekiel's home and sat down? They had been listening to false prophets for a long time. Ezekiel's words may have been in total opposition to their theology; however, using Ezekiel, the LORD had obtained their attention. In the home of Ezekiel and through the mouth of Ezekiel, the LORD could offer the words that would retrieve the *house of Israel* from the sins of the false prophets, remove the idols from their hearts and place the LORD where He belonged. The LORD would not force Himself on the elders, but He did arrange the circumstances so they would hear His words through Ezekiel. The *elders of Israel* were warned.

14. Ezekiel's Fourteenth Assignment from the LORD

a) The Judgment of the Famine

Eze 14:12 Then the word of the LORD came to me saying, ^{Eze 14:13} "Son of man, if a country sins against Me by committing unfaithfulness, and I stretch out My hand against it, destroy its supply of bread, send famine against it and cut off from it both man and beast,

As the LORD spoke to Ezekiel for the fourteenth time in this second vision, He had a somewhat private message for the prophet. First, sinful countries would face *the judgment of famine* – the absence of food for “**man and beast.**”

Starvation seems to be worldwide. America is one country that has sought to feed the world and eliminate starvation. Yet, when we look close at every country, nation or tribe that struggles with the gathering of food to meet the needs of the people, “**unfaithfulness**” to the LORD God prevails. Godlessness prevails. Evil prevails. Sin prevails. Surely the LORD would not allow humans to be born and then allow them to starve! Yes, He would. The miracle of birth was set in motion by the LORD during the six days of creation. It has been an ongoing miracle that never ceases. Humans beget humans. Even sinful humans, lusting in sinful relations beget humans. Marriage abandoned, sex embraced, children born with a father on the hunt for the next woman, with the woman on the hunt for a lifetime of food for herself and her child. Then, she succumbs to the next man on the hunt. All with gods of their own making in their hearts, blinding them in their faces, causing them to stumble over and over and over in their sin. And, to make matters worse, the religious man, the false prophet stands nearby, the witch doctors in the tribes of Africa, the clerics in the Arab countries and the priests of India and the orient. All presiding over the poorest of the poor in the world – starving! Why? Because they have ignored the LORD. They all came from the descendants of the three boys of Noah. They are all cousins in fact. They all have the heritage of the knowledge of the LORD that saved Noah and his family. They all have a story in their history. They all ignored the story and created the gods of their own imaginations. What about these countries and people? Will the LORD not save them? No. Because they are unfaithful to Him and are without excuse.

b) The Righteous Deliver Only Themselves

Eze 14:14 **even *though* these three men, Noah, Daniel and Job were in its midst, by their *own* righteousness they could *only* deliver themselves," declares the Lord GOD.**

Will the LORD not save any of the countries in rebellion against Him? No. Here we find His answer, ““even *though* these three men, Noah, Daniel and Job were in its midst, by their *own* righteousness they could *only* deliver themselves,” declares the Lord GOD.”

What has the LORD just said? It is simple. The righteousness of the righteous can save only themselves and no one else. Sinners cannot hang on to the coat tails of the righteous and find themselves in the presence of the LORD at death. Each soul is responsible for his own decision about the LORD. Furthermore, a sinful city, country or nation will not be saved because it has been blessed to have a Billy Graham living in one of its states!

c) The Judgment of the Beasts

Eze 14:15 **"If I were to cause wild beasts to pass through the land and they depopulated it, and it became desolate so that no one would pass through it because of the beasts,**

Second, sinful countries will face the *judgment of the beasts*. As with *judgment of the famine* above, would the LORD bring such a travesty on a country? Yes! For all the same reasons stated in the section above about the *judgment of the famine*, the LORD will bring the *judgment of the beasts*.

d) The Righteous Deliver Just Themselves

Eze 14:16 ***though* these three men were in its midst, as I live," declares the Lord GOD, "they could not deliver either *their* sons or *their* daughters. They alone would be delivered, but the country would be desolate.**

In lockstep, the LORD did not change His answer with this judgment. Even if Noah, Daniel and Job lived in these areas, only they would be saved. They could not save even their own children.

e) The Judgment of the Sword

Eze 14:17 "Or if I should bring a sword on that country and say, 'Let the sword pass through the country and cut off man and beast from it,'

To the judgment of the famine and the beasts, the LORD adds the *judgment of the sword*. Review the judgment of the famine above for all the same reasons that the LORD will send the sword.

f) The Righteous Deliver Merely Themselves

Eze 14:18 even though these three men were in its midst, as I live," declares the Lord GOD, "they could not deliver either their sons or their daughters, but they alone would be delivered.

Once again, if Noah, Daniel and Job lived in such a country, only they could be delivered, not their children.

g) The Judgment of the Blood

Eze 14:19 "Or if I should send a plague against that country and pour out My wrath in blood on it to cut off man and beast from it,

To the famine, beasts and sword, the LORD now adds the *judgment of the plague*. The *plague* in Hebrew means *pestilence*, a term that means *an epidemic disease that attacks a large population at the same time*. What did this *plague* lead to? **"Blood."** In other places the same Hebrew word is translated *death*. Epidemic diseases most often attack the **"blood"** and cause death. When Noah debarked from the Ark, the LORD gave the food parameters for life after the flood. Any animal could be eaten except humans; however, the blood had to be drained because He said, in Genesis 9:4 "Only you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood." In the LORD's instructions to the Israelites at the foot of Mount Sinai He said in Leviticus 17:11, "For the life of the flesh is in the blood." All humans ultimately die because of something in connection with the blood. When the body ceases from its duty to purify the blood, death follows. When the body ceases to pump the blood through the organs to purify the blood, death comes. When *pestilence* attacks the body, the blood is ultimately attacked, and death comes. Why would the LORD send *pestilence*? For the same reasons that he sent the famine, beasts and sword – death.

h) The Righteous Deliver Simply Themselves

Eze 14:20 even though Noah, Daniel and Job were in its midst, as I live," declares the Lord GOD, "they could not deliver either their son or their daughter. They would deliver only themselves by their righteousness."

Only Noah, Daniel and Job would be delivered by the LORD in the case of these four judgments and they, with all their influence with the LORD, could not save their children.

i) The Four Judgments of the LORD

Eze 14:21 For thus says the Lord GOD, "How much more when I send My four severe judgments against Jerusalem: sword, famine, wild beasts and plague to cut off man and beast from it!

If only Noah, Daniel and Job could be saved from these judgments, no one in Jerusalem could be saved.

(1) Survivors Left

Eze 14:22 "Yet, behold, survivors will be left in it who will be brought out, both sons and daughters. Behold, they are going to come forth to you and you will see their conduct and actions; then you will be comforted for the calamity which I have brought against Jerusalem for everything which I have brought upon it."

Will the LORD send these four *judgments* on Jerusalem? Yes! Will everyone die? No. The LORD will choose some to be survivors. When Ezekiel ultimately sees who they are, he will be well pleased with the LORD.

(2) Survivors Understand

Eze 14:23 "Then they will comfort you when you see their conduct and actions, for you will know that I have not done in vain whatever I did to it," declares the Lord GOD.

When the survivors ultimately join Ezekiel by the *Chebar River*, they will bring comfort to him. How? Ezekiel will be impressed with the lives of the survivors, their walk with the LORD, their faithfulness to Him. Just by getting to know the survivors, Ezekiel will understand why the LORD delivered them but not all the rest of the wicked in the Southern Kingdom. The LORD will purposefully make His selection not **"in vain,"** meaning *not without thought or for no reason at all!*

15. Ezekiel's Fifteenth Assignment from the LORD

a) Charred Wood

Eze 15:1 Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying, Eze 15:2 "Son of man, how is the wood of the vine better than any wood of a branch which is among the trees of the forest? Eze 15:3 "Can wood be taken from it to make anything, or can men take a peg from it on which to hang any vessel? Eze 15:4 "If it has been put into the fire for fuel, and the fire has consumed both of its ends and its middle part has been charred, is it then useful for anything?"

The private meeting between the LORD and Ezekiel continued into this fifteenth assignment for the prophet. We could name this assignment *"Burnt Wood."* The LORD opened with this question, **"how is the wood of the vine better than any wood of a branch which is among the trees of the forest?"** Is there a difference between the wood of the grapevine and the wood of a tree?

We can find the grapevine used throughout the Scripture to represent the Nation of Israel as a whole, all twelve tribes included, just as we find it in this passage. The vines of the grapes grow quickly and produce a vast quantity of fruit on each branch to the delight of the growers and the consumers. Yet, the wood of the grapevine is useful for very few other purposes. No one would make a permanent tent pole with the wood; it is simply too brittle and flimsy. No one would carve it into a peg for joining two pieces of wood because within just a few weeks after being clipped from the main stalk, the wood would begin to degrade and crumble into pulp. Is the wood of the grape any better than the wood of the oak, maple or pine for example? No, it is not. It produces fruit for a season to feed humans right off the vine, if needed, without any processing. However, the same vine is worthless for the purposes of building a chair, a table, a cane, a cage, or a building; the oak, maple and pine are for those purposes.

But even if the oak, maple and pine are useful for purposes of construction, if the wood is put into the fire and burned on both ends, scorched in the middle, that wood is worthless too; no better than the wood of the vine. The burnt oak, maple and pine cannot be trusted for any construction purposes. Why? Burnt, or even charred wood, will ignite once again with the strike of a spark. Technically, charcoal is partially burned wood that is ready to burn again being ignited solely by a flash from a spark with a much lower temperature normally needed to start an oak, maple or pine fire. But beside its use for the warmth of a fire, it, too, is worthless.

b) Unused Wood

Eze 15:5 "Behold, while it is intact, it is not made into anything. How much less, when the fire has consumed it and it is charred, can it still be made into anything!"

Charred wood is no different from grapevine for building purposes; both are worthless. But what if, for instance, the oak, maple and pine are never carved into anything useful. Unused wood does have worth because it has the potential of being made into something useful. However, until it is made into something, it is no more useful than the grapevine. Additionally, it is essentially no better than the charred wood. Surely the LORD is leading to some other great point with this conversation. What is the LORD's purpose in discussing the two different kinds of wood in this passage?

c) Burnt Wood

Eze 15:6 "Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD, 'As the wood of the vine among the trees of the forest, which I have given to the fire for fuel, so have I given up the inhabitants of Jerusalem; ^{Eze 15:7a} and I set My face against them. Though they have come out of the fire, yet the fire will consume them.

Here, the LORD arrived at the purpose of His conversation with Ezekiel. As previously mentioned in this assignment, the *Nation of Israel* was the subject associated with the “**vine among the trees of the forest.**” Specifically, the vine in this passage was the “**inhabitants of Jerusalem**” which included the tribes of Judah and Benjamin from the Southern Kingdom and the descendants of the tribes of Ephraim, Manasseh and Simeon from the old Northern Kingdom. Together, they were burnt wood to the LORD – worthless for any purpose except firewood.

Once again, we see the LORD say, “**I will set My face against them.**” Once again, no living human should ever want to experience the sight of the LORD. These inhabitants for the Southern Kingdom had already been charred by the likes of Nebuchadnezzar in two campaigns, one in 606 BC and the other in 597 BC. Nevertheless, Nebuchadnezzar would drive a campaign once again right through the walls of the gates of the city and destroy almost everything within and that included all the inhabitants. With his entry into the city in 586 BC, the inhabitants of the Southern Kingdom would be consumed.

d) Worthless Wood

Eze 15:7b Then you will know that I am the LORD, when I set My face against them.

Eze 15:8 'Thus I will make the land desolate, because they have acted unfaithfully,'" declares the Lord GOD.

If Ezekiel had not recognized this point by this time in the story, surely by now he would know that the LORD was the LORD of all. But when? Not until he sees the LORD's wrath on the Southern Kingdom in 586 BC by the hands of Nebuchadnezzar. At that time, those who see the LORD's face, the unfaithful, will be destroyed!