

# How God Responds to Unbelieving Leaders and Nations

We will be studying the first part of Ezekiel 14 in this study. This chapter will teach us how God responds to the leaders and people of a nation when they seek counsel. We will discover eight principles about how God responds.

We discovered in Ezekiel 3:24 that the prophet Ezekiel had a strange ministry. He did not stand behind a pulpit in a church to preach. Instead, Ezekiel was told to shut himself in his house. Yahweh said that he would not be able to speak until it was time for him to speak. Maybe that was a good thing. Most pastors tend to talk a lot! So, Ezekiel's ministry was confined to his house and he was mute, except for on a few occasions. A good example of this type of ministry was given to us in Ezekiel 8:1. There the prophet Ezekiel was sitting in his house and the elders of the exiles from Judah were sitting in front of him. While they were sitting together, Yahweh gave Ezekiel a vision of His glory. In our study those same elders or another group of elders come and sat down in front of him. This will occur again in Ezekiel 20:1.

It is obvious these elders were not from Jerusalem since the trip from Jerusalem to Babylon was nearly 900 miles (1,448 km). Since they would have traveled by foot or by animal, it would have taken at least one month to travel on a horse, if they rode on a horse. So, these were the elders living close by who were part of the exile group. So, Ezekiel ministered in his home to these elders.

Ezekiel 14:1-11 has three major sections. The first section is verses 1-5. The second is verse 7 and the third is verses 8-9. Verse 6 is a transition and verses 10-11 are the summary.

**GOD RESPONDS TO THE ELDERS IN EXILE.** Our study begins with Ezekiel 14:1. It describes God's response to the elders in exile who were asking for counsel.

*Then some elders of Israel came to me and sat down before me.*

*Ezekiel 14:1 (NASB)*

Ezekiel tells us that on some day they came to his house and sat down facing him. It must have been an interesting experience to have the leading men in exile ask for guidance about an issue. Verses 2-3 say,

*And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "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. Should I be consulted by them at all?"*

*Ezekiel 14:2-3 (NASB)*



**Who Sits On the Throne of Your Heart?**

Yahweh told Ezekiel that these elders are not what they appear to be on the outside because they had set up idols in their hearts. This reminds me of a Campus Crusade cartoon in a gospel tract. It illustrates a choice that every unbeliever and

believer in God has. We can either sit on the throne of our own hearts or let Christ sit on the throne of our hearts. In that gospel tract, unbelievers are told they must want Jesus to sit on the throne of their hearts. The point is, “Who is in control of your life?” Who controls your time, diet, habits, pride, free time, health, money, and any ministry that God called you to perform? Even good things can become an idol, if they shove God out of the way!

Notice again that Yahweh said they had set up idols in their hearts. The two words “set up” come from one Hebrew word, *ala*. The word literally means “to ascend, to lift up, or to climb.” That is, these elders had put their idols up high in their heart. Their hearts were literally worshiping idols of their own heart. Charles Dyer in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* makes this great point,

The idolatry in Jerusalem was openly displayed (chap. 8), but in Babylon was more subtle—it was internal rather than external.<sup>1</sup>

That is, Ezekiel could not see their hearts, but Yahweh could. Yet, they came to seek counsel from Ezekiel about an issue, while having or keeping idols in their hearts. Now we do not know the issue for which they sought counsel. We are only told they came for counsel.

Then Yahweh said that as a result of the elders’ iniquity, they had created stumbling blocks right in front of their faces. These stumbling blocks may have been laws they passed, actions they took, or comments that caused others to stumble or sin. They saw the situation but did nothing. This gives us the first principle in this study.

## Principle 1 – Idols in the heart can become stumbling blocks to others.

Then Yahweh asked a rhetorical question, “Should I be consulted by them at all?” Since these elders had replaced Yahweh with the idols sitting high up in their hearts, why should He give them an answer? It would be like someone

rejecting you but then asking for money when they had a need in spite of disliking you! Imagine someone rejected Yahweh and worshiped Baal, Tammuz, or the god Osiris. Then they asked Yahweh for help or for money. So, Yahweh responded, “Should I be consulted by them?” That is, why did they come to Me? The implied answer is no!! Is it right for them to ask Yahweh for help?

So let me ask this question, “Is it right for believers to seek God when they do not read the Scriptures, do not pray, or do not thank Him for what He has done for example? Is it right to seek Yahweh’s help if you have not left the idols of your heart? This gives us the second principle in this study.

## Principle 2 – God does not answer the prayers of those who have idols in their heart.

This applies to believers too! Notice that Psalm 66:18 states,

*If I regard wickedness in my heart,  
The Lord will not hear. Psalm 66:18 (NASB)*

In Proverbs 28:9, Solomon said,

*He who turns away his ear from listening to the law,  
Even his prayer is an abomination. Proverb 28:9 (NASB)*

Then verse 4 continues with,

*“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, puts right before his face the stumbling block of his iniquity, 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 . . .”’” Ezekiel 14:4 (NASB)*

Now Yahweh repeats a part of verse 3 and then says He will answer the inquirer. Now I doubt that the elders expected that Yahweh Himself was going to answer them. But He did. He said He would answer them according to the multitude of their idols. This gives us a third principle about how God deals

<sup>1</sup> Charles Dyer, Ezekiel. Old Testament. The Bible Knowledge Commentary. Char-  
iot Victor Publishing. 1985. p. 1252.

with the wicked.

### **Principle 3 – God does not answer the prayers of the wicked who have idols in their heart.**

There are two uncomfortable facts about sin that we should remember. First, some sins are worse than others (Genesis 18:20; Exodus 32:30-31; 1 Samuel 2:17; Proverbs 6:16-19; Ezekiel 23:11; John 19:11). Some of our sins are more defiling. Second, Yahweh said He considers how many idols we have in our hearts and answers us accordingly. This means every believer is engaged in a battle to get rid of idols of the heart. That is a mark of a Christian (Romans 8:13-14). We cannot do this by ourselves. We must ask God to help us walk in the Spirit every minute.

Then verse 5 explains why Yahweh answered the elders according to the multitude of idols in their hearts,

““... in order to lay hold of the hearts of the house of Israel who are estranged from Me through all their idols.”” Ezekiel 14:5 (NASB)

Yahweh would do that to an elder of Israel in order to “lay hold” of the hearts of the house of Israel because they were estranged from Him. The Hebrew word for “to lay hold” is *tapas*. It means “to seize” or “to take hold of.” Yahweh wanted to seize their hearts and draw them back to Himself. The Hebrew word for “estranged” has the idea of someone who has “turned aside.” They had turned away from God because of the idols of their hearts and had become estranged or separated from Him. Yahweh wanted to seize them.

1 Kings 11:4-8 tells us that when King Solomon was old his heart was turned away from Yahweh by his wives. He then pursued idols. The idols of Solomon’s heart were his many wives. His heart was not completely devoted to Yahweh. Isaiah 1:4 says this about Israel,

**Alas, sinful nation,  
People weighed down with iniquity,  
Offspring of evildoers,**

**Sons who act corruptly!**

**They have abandoned the LORD,**

**They have despised the Holy One of Israel,**

**They have turned away from Him.**

Isaiah 1:4 (NASB)

Acts 17:27 reminds us that God is “not far” from us, but we turn away from Him! We become estranged. He is always near. If we ever feel distant from Yahweh, it is because of our own hearts!

So, Yahweh said He would “give him an answer” in order to seize the hearts of Israel and pull them back. What was the answer? It was punishment. This gives us another principle.

### **Principle 4 – When God disciplines us for our sin, He may design it to bring others to Himself.**

**THE CENTRAL CALL.** Verse 6 is now a call to repentance.

“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.”’” Ezekiel 14:6 (NASB)

The Hebrew word for “repent” means “to turn back.” The same root word is also used for “turn away” and “turn.” The reason I want you to see this detail is that it helps us understand that repentance occurs when we turn away from our idols and abominations and turn back to Yahweh. This gives us a wonderful and short definition of repentance. Repentance is turning away from our sin and turning to God. So, we have a fifth principle. It is,

### **Principle 5 – To repent is to turn away from the idols of our hearts and return to God fully committed.**

So we must make a decision to return to our God. Even though salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, Yahweh still calls us to believe in Christ, remove

the idols of our hearts, and put Him high up in our hearts. That is the paradox of salvation and sanctification for believers. He chooses us to be saved, but we must still respond by believing in Christ.

**GOD RESPONDS TO THE NATION IN EXILE.** In verses 7-8 Yahweh now speaks about the exiles in Babylon.

“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. 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.” Ezekiel 14:7-8 (NASB)

Verse 7 is about those of the nation of Israel and any immigrant who was in Israel at the time of the invasion who are in exile in Babylon. The immigrants would have been Gentiles who decided to live among the Israelites and to follow Yahweh. According to the Mosaic Law, anyone who decided to live among the Israelites was obligated to follow the Mosaic Law. So Yahweh speaks to them too!

Then verse 7 repeats verses 3 and 4. That is, if any of them had idols lifted up in their hearts and sought counsel with a prophet of Yahweh, He would punish them. The punishment is described in verse 8. Yahweh would set His face against that person. Now that is trouble! The literal Hebrew says that Yahweh would set His face “at” that person. He would make Him a sign, a proverb, and cut him off from the rest of the nation. This judgment is described in Leviticus 20:3-6 and Deuteronomy 28:27. I would encourage you to read the entire chapter of Deuteronomy 28 to discover Yahweh’s warnings to the nation. Now here is the warning in Deuteronomy 28:37,

You shall become a horror, a proverb, and a taunt among all the people where the LORD drives you. Deuteronomy 28:37 (NASB)

So what have we learned? It is arrogance to inquire of the Lord if a person is worshiping idols in his or her heart. Then Yahweh

said thus they would know “that I am the LORD.” While our own nation is not Israel, I believe we may experience these same judgments.

**GOD RESPONDS TO THE FALSE PROPHETS IN EXILE.** Verse 9 is now directed to the many false prophets in Israel who only gave positive messages to the people. They kept their so-called messages from the Lord positive. They prophesied peace, when destruction was actually coming!

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. Ezekiel 14:9 (NASB)

The Hebrew word for “prevailed” is *pata*. It can be translated as “to deceive, to seduce, and to delude.” The point is the prophet has been deceived by Yahweh. He or she was a false prophet. In verses 7-8 the inquirer went to a prophet of Yahweh. But in this verse, the inquirer goes to a false prophet. Yahweh is saying that if you seek counsel from one of My prophets, I will punish you. If you decide to seek a false prophet, I will also punish you too, but in a different way. So, if the elders or people who had idols set up in their hearts sought Yahweh’s prophet or sought the false prophet they were going to be punished. Maybe they wanted one of those positive-speaking prophets or teachers. Consequently, Yahweh said He would destroy the false prophet too!

This gives us a sixth principle. Yahweh allows false prophets to exist. They are like candy to the hardened unbeliever.

## **Principle 6 – Yahweh allows false teachers to exist. They are like magnets to the unbelieving religious person.**

Romans 1:18-32 teaches us that God gives a person over to their sin when they refuse the truth about Him and want the idols in their heart. So Yahweh says He will destroy the false teachers.

Verses 10-11a announce that the punishment on the inquirer and the false prophets are equal. Then we are given

the reason.

“They will bear the punishment of their iniquity; as the iniquity of the inquirer is, so the iniquity of the prophet will be, in order that the house of Israel may no longer stray from Me and no longer defile themselves with all their transgressions.” Ezekiel 14:10-11a)

The Hebrew word for “iniquity” can also mean “guilt” or “punishment.” Either meaning fits. Yahweh says the inquirer and the false prophet are both guilty. Both the idol-worshipping inquirer and the false prophet who pretends to be a true prophet will be punished. There is a New Testament example of this in Revelation 2:20-23. It is about a false teacher called Jezebel and her followers. God warned them that He would make them sick or kill them. The reason for the judgment against Israel was to rescue Israel from straying from the Lord. Since no one enjoys being punished, the horror of the devastation of Jerusalem might have motivated Israel to no longer defile themselves with all of their abominations. This gives us a seventh principle.

### **Principle 7 – Idols of the heart defile us. Yahweh urges us to flee them to avoid punishment.**

**MESSAGE TO THE FALSE PROPHETS IN EXILE.** Verse 11 concludes with,

“Thus they will be My people, and I shall be their God,” declares the Lord GOD.” Ezekiel 14:11b (NASB)

This promise is from Yahweh to Israel. It is a wonderful promise. It reveals that after Israel had been punished they would recognize Him as the true God and worship Him. This will not occur until the second coming of Christ occurs (Zechariah 12:10-14).

Just as the all of the Israelites who are alive at the second coming of Christ will be saved His people (Romans 11:25-26), 2 Corinthians 6:16 teaches us that all Christians are His people and He is our God. This gives us our eight principle

which is “someday all of the elect will be His people, and He will be their God.”

### **Principle 8 – Someday all of the elect will be His people, and He will be their God.**

Someday all the elect, that is every believer since Adam and Eve, will be called God’s people. We will be His people.

**CONCLUSION.** We have learned that God will punish the leaders, false prophets and prophetesses, and false teachers because they have idols in their hearts. They love those idols and not God. Christ is not ruling as their Savior, Lord and the king of their lives. We could say He is not sitting on the throne of their hearts. Why? Because they have chosen other things to love and worship.

However, true believers in Christ desire to have Christ sitting on the throne in their hearts ruling and controlling them. They desire to please Him. Romans 8:13-14 teaches that Christians will be putting to death the sin in our bodies. That occurs by walking in the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:16-23). As a result, the idols of the heart will be disappearing from our hearts. Christ will rule.

Someday believers will be in heaven. We will not have any idols of our hearts, nor will we be in a war with the evil desires of our hearts. The victory will be won because Jesus Christ defeated sin, death, and Satan when He died on the cross and was resurrected. He freed us from slavery to sin and now we rejoice that we can be slaves of righteousness. We worship the one and only true God—Yahweh Himself.