

# When The Righteousness of Others May Not Help You

On our website, NeverThirsty.org, there is a short study titled, “Does God appoint evil leaders to lead nations?” It has been very popular in recent years. It reminds us that Romans 13:1 says our God appoints the leaders of our nations. It says,

**Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. .Romans 13:1 (NASB)**

So, God establishes kings, queens, prime ministers, presidents, and the leaders of nations. They serve or hold office only because God has allowed them to do so. Their primary function according to Romans 13:3-4 is to be a minister for God.

These leaders are to serve God by suppressing evil. Many evil leaders suppress evil to a degree, but not all.

A good example of this is found in Jeremiah 25:8-13. There God called King Nebuchadnezzar “My Servant.” Then He had King Nebuchadnezzar invade Israel to judge Israel’s sin. The Babylonians left the land desolate. In verse 12 God said that after seventy years of captivity, He would punish King Nebuchadnezzar and his nation “for their iniquity.” Why would God punish the king and his nation when He influenced them to invade Israel? Zechariah 1:15 hints that God was angry with all of

the nations surrounding Israel because they were excessively abusive to Israel. That includes King Nebuchadnezzar and the subsequent leaders of the Babylonian empire. Now watch what Yahweh did to the Babylonian empire because it did this.

In Isaiah 44:28 we read that Yahweh called King Cyrus “My Shepherd,” and said that he would perform all My desire. The book of Daniel teaches us that King Cyrus defeated the Babylonian empire. Then the last part of Isaiah 44:28 says that King Cyrus would rebuild Jerusalem and the temple. The book of Daniel teaches us that Yahweh would later use the empire of Greece to punish the Medio-Persian Empire. Then the Roman empire punished the Grecian empire, and the pattern continues. The point is that Yahweh uses other nations to punish more evil nations for their excessive evil. Then when the invading

leader and his army become excessively evil, Yahweh will punish them using yet another nation. Jeremiah 18:7-10 gives us this principle.



**At one moment I might speak concerning a nation or concerning a kingdom to uproot, to pull**

**down, or to destroy it; if that nation against which I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent concerning the calamity I planned to bring on it. Or at another moment I might speak concerning a nation or concerning a kingdom to build up or to plant it; if it does evil in My sight by not obeying My voice, then I will think better of the good with which I had promised to bless it. Jeremiah**

18:7-10 (NASB)

We normally think of evil as violence, killing the living and the unborn, stealing, causing famine, and destroying property. But in our study, we are told Yahweh punishes those nations that are unfaithful to Him. Romans 13 has told us the leaders of nations are his servants. When they are unfaithful, they should not be surprised that Yahweh will punish them. That happened to Israel.

**A RIGHTEOUS MAN’S PRAYERS MAY NOT HELP YOU.** That brings us to our study which is of Ezekiel 14:12-23. The study has two sections. The first is from verses 12-21. The second section is from verse 22-23. Verse 12 says.

Then the word of the LORD came to me saying, “Son of man, if a country sins against Me by committing unfaithfulness, and I stretch out My hand against it . . .”

Ezekiel 14:12-13a (NASB)

Yahweh speaks. He says “Son of Man, if a country sins against Me by committing unfaithfulness.” The sad truth is that nations are often unfaithful to Yahweh because they violate Romans 13:1-4. This was especially true of the nation of Israel because it had a very close and special relationship with Yahweh. The nation of Israel was His chosen people because He loved them. In Deuteronomy 7:6-7 Yahweh said,

For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. The LORD did

not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but because the LORD loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers. Deuteronomy 7:6-8a (NASB)

This reminds us that God did not choose us for salvation because we were beautiful or handsome. He did not choose us because we were intelligent or godly. He simply chose us because He loves us and He still loves. Why? Maybe we will discover the answer in heaven someday. He has not told us why He chose some and not others. So, Yahweh chose Israel to be His nation. Then he assigned them the responsibility to tell

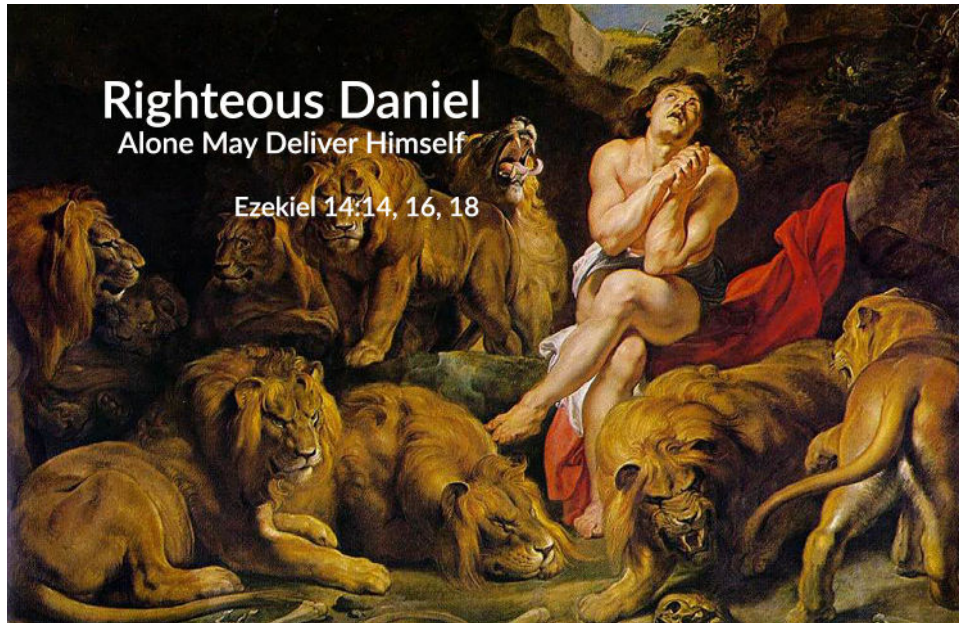
the surrounding nations about Himself. Israel was to be Yahweh’s witness (Isaiah 43:10). But they became unfaithful and that resulted in great iniquity.

The Hebrew word for “unfaithful” in verse 13 is *maal*. It primarily refers to a

violation of trust between individuals. It is also translated as “disloyal.” Numbers 5:6 and other passages connect unfaithfulness with sin. Here is Numbers 5:6.

When a man or woman commits any of the sins of mankind, acting unfaithfully against the LORD. Numbers 5:6b (NASB)

That is, unfaithfulness results in sin. For example, when a spouse is unfaithful or disloyal to their spouse, he or she will be more willing to commit adultery. We would say that adultery is an act of unfaithfulness. So, in our study when Yahweh said that if a nation sins against Me by being unfaithful, He gave us a principle that applies to all nations. That was espe-



cially true of Israel when Yahweh said it. I believe that in our time the nations of the west, such as Canada, Europe, Australia, New Zealand, and the United States, have had a special relationship since the time of the Reformation. Consequently, this principle also applies to them. They are increasingly unfaithful. Remember Yahweh said, “If a country sins against Me by committing unfaithfulness, and I stretch out My hand against it . . .”

The last part of verse 13 through verse 20 describe how Yahweh will punish such nations. We are going to discover four ways that Yahweh uses to punish a nation. The first one is given in verses 13 and 14.

... 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, 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. Ezekiel 14:13b-14 (NASB)

So, if a nation becomes unfaithful or disloyal to Yahweh, He may choose to destroy its supply of bread and cause a famine. That would result in the death of men and beasts. The Hebrew

word for “destroy” has the sense of “broken, shatter, or break.” That is, Yahweh would break the supply of food. We can imagine going to the grocery store and not finding milk, eggs, baby food, and other food supplies. That has happened in the last two years in our country.

Then Yahweh added that even if Noah, Daniel, and Job were living in the nation, the famine could not be stopped.

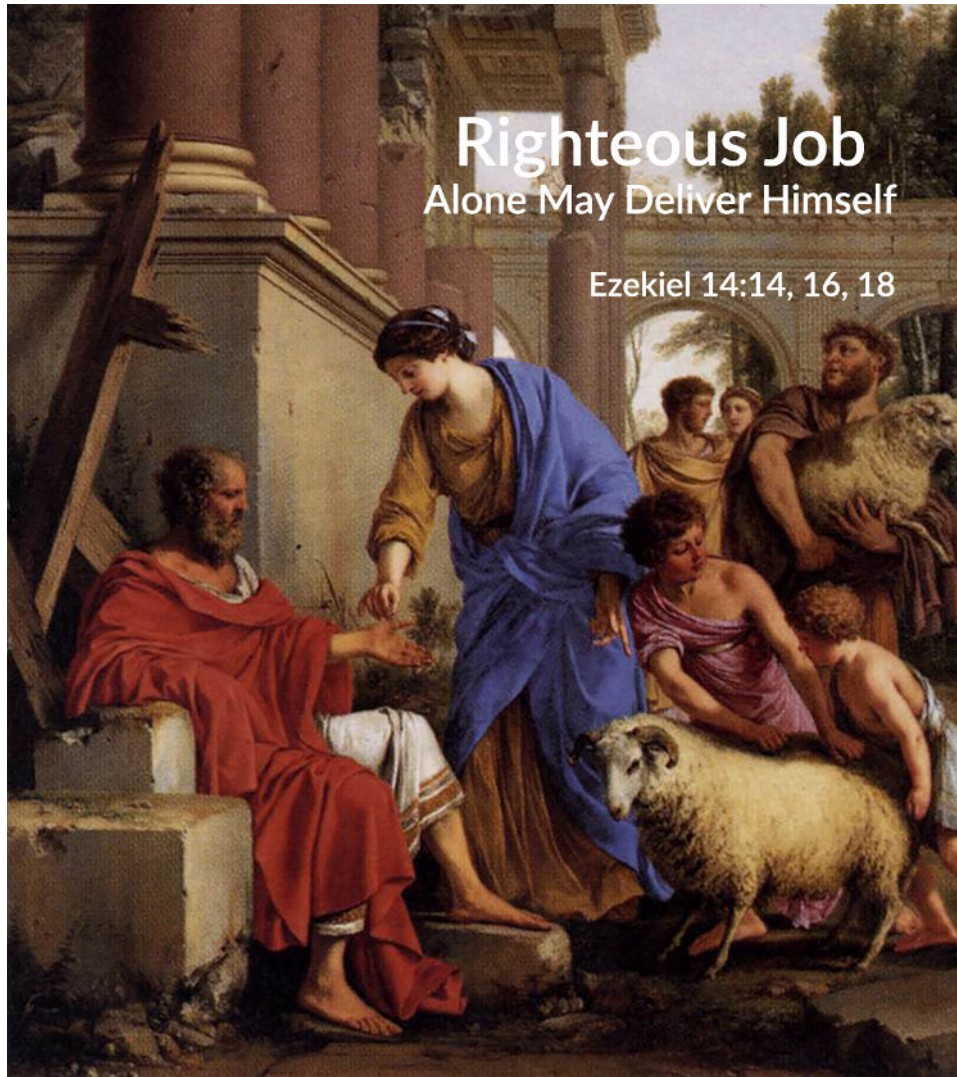
Their righteousness could only deliver themselves. It must have been a surprise to the elders who visited Ezekiel that righteous men such as these men could not save them.

Verses 15-16 describe the second way Yahweh may choose to punish a nation.

“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, 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.” Ezekiel 14:15-16 (NASB)

The second type of punishment is that Yahweh will allow wild



## Righteous Job Alone May Deliver Himself

Ezekiel 14:14, 16, 18

beasts to roam through a nation killing people. Then we are told again that even Noah, Daniel, and Job would not be able to help them. This time Yahweh adds that they would not even be able to rescue their sons and daughters. This appears to assume that they might be able to rescue their wives. Finally, we are told they could only deliver themselves.

The third way Yahweh punishes nations is given in verses 17-18.

**“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,’ 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. Ezekiel 14:17-18 (NASB)**

This time we are told that Yahweh uses the sword or war to punish a nation. He punishes a nation by killing people and beasts that live in the nation. Once again, we are told that Noah, Daniel, and Job would not be able to help them. They would not be able to save their sons or their daughters, and could only save themselves.

The fourth and last way Yahweh punishes nations is to use plagues. Verses 19-20 say,

**“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, 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.” Ezekiel 14:19-20 (NASB)**

The Hebrew word for “plague” in this verse refers to a pandemic that causes many to die. During the last three years our nation has experienced all four types of punishment, except for war on our nation’s soil. We have had shortages of food. We have had massive numbers of chickens and cattle die, and the serious plague of COVID. We are under judgment already.

In Leviticus 26:22-26, Yahweh said that He would use these four types of punishments on Israel if it was unfaithful. There He refers to unfaithfulness as hostility. That describes

the nations of the west. We are increasingly hostile to God, just as Israel was. So, Yahweh uses different types of punishment for nations. All four types of punishment will be used in the great tribulation, that is, the last half of the tribulation. Just read the seal judgments in Revelation 6:1-7, the trumpet judgments in Revelation 8:6-12, the bowl judgments in Revelation 16:1-21, and Revelation 18:8. Yahweh uses these four types of punishments on leaders and nations.

Then in verse 21 Yahweh makes the point that once these four punishments begin, a righteous man will not be able to stop them. He said,

**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!” Ezekiel 14:21 (NASB)**

Now there is an important spiritual principle that we must not miss in verses 2-21. Four times Yahweh has said that Noah, Daniel, and Job could not rescue an unfaithful nation. Three times they were told they could not rescue their sons or their daughters. Four times we have been told they could only rescue themselves. When they did, it would be by their own righteousness.

So, why were these three men selected? First, Noah is the man who built the ark so that his family could escape the worldwide flood that drowned everyone else living on the surface of the earth. 2 Peter 2:5 tells us that he was a righteous man. Here is verse 5.

**... but preserved Noah, a preacher of righteousness, with seven others, when He brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly. 2 Peter 2:4-5 (NASB)**

So, in order for Yahweh to destroy all the living things on the ancient world, He removed righteous Noah and his family of eight. Righteous Noah could not save the other people.

The second person is Daniel. His presence in Jerusalem did not rescue the people in Israel from the Babylonian army invading Israel. Instead, Yahweh removed him and took him to Babylon. Also, Daniel’s presence in Babylon did not stop

Yahweh from having the Medo-Persian empire invade the Babylonian empire either. Finally, Daniel 9:23 tells us that Yahweh called Daniel a precious man. The NASB says he was “highly esteemed.” But the Hebrew means “precious or pleasant.” So Daniel was very special.

The third person is Job. Job 1:1 tells us that he was a blameless man. He held to his integrity, feared God, and turned away from evil. Then in verse 8 we are told he was an upright man. So, he was also a righteous man! But he could not stop his sons and daughters, his servants, or animals from being raided. He could not stop the weather from destroying their homes.

This gives us the principle that a righteous man may not be able to help rescue you if Yahweh has already planned to punish you for unfaithfulness. If you refuse to stop sinning and Yahweh has decided to punish you, then a righteous person cannot help you. This gives us an important principle. A righteous man cannot always help us escape from a problem.

That was Yahweh’s message to the prophet Ezekiel. Israel was excessively unfaithful and they had refused to listen and repent of their sin. Their hearts were hardened. So, the presence of righteous men would not stop their punishment.

**YAHWEH IS SLOW TO PUNISH, BUT HE WILL PUNISH.** Verse 22 begins the second and last section of Yahweh’s message. He said there would be some survivors after the Babylonian invasion.

*“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.” Ezekiel 14:22 (NASB)*

Now Yahweh said there would be some survivors. When the exiles in Babylon saw the “conduct and actions” of the new captives, they would be comforted. The Hebrew word for “actions” usually refers to evil actions, but not always in the Old Testament. Here the message is that their actions were evil. For if their behavior had been righteous, then people would wonder why Yahweh destroyed Jerusalem. But if their behavior was evil, that would reveal that Yahweh was justified.

This reveals that the remnant from the three Babylonian invasions in 605 B.C., 597 B.C. and 586 B.C. included wicked and righteous people. We have already learned in Ezekiel 9 that Yahweh protected the righteous from being killed when the man in linen, an angel, placed a mark on the foreheads of those who groaned over evil. We also saw the slaughter of the wicked in Jerusalem was massive. Yet, this chapter reveals that most of the remnant in the third Babylonian invasion in 586 B.C. would be wicked men. This reveals Yahweh was justified by destroying the city. This means that Yahweh is slow to punish, but He will punish men who refuse to repent.

Verse 23 is the conclusion.

*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. Ezekiel 14:23 (NASB)*

The conclusion is that the slaughter of Jerusalem was not in vain. Yahweh accomplished good. Romans 8:28 reminds us that God does cause all things to work together for good. The destruction of Jerusalem and the punishment upon Jerusalem and Israel accomplished good.

**CONCLUSION.** We have already learned one principle from this study. It is this,

### **Principle #1 – A righteous man cannot always help us escape from a problem.**

That is the primary message of this passage. Israel was so unfaithful that the presence of a righteous man could not rescue them. Apparently, some of the exiles were thinking that the few righteous men left in Israel would rescue them. But Yahweh reveals they did not understand this important spiritual principle.

Before we end our study, let me give you four more spiritual principles. The second principle is found in James 5:16 which teaches us that the effective prayer of a righteous man accomplishes much. That is, when a righteous man is seriously given to prayer, much can be accomplished.

James 5:17-18 gives us the example of Elijah who caused

the rain to stop and start because of his prayer. Moses rescued Israel from being severely punished multiple times. Samuel prayed for the defeat of the Philistines and they were defeated. Maybe the one person I like most in Scripture is the man who is simply called the “man of God” in 1 Kings 13:1-6. He prayed for healing for King Jeroboam’s withered hand and God healed the king’s hand. So, the point is that a righteous man can accomplish much. But he cannot accomplish anything that would violate God’s will. A second principle is that the prayers of a righteous man can accomplish many great things that others cannot accomplish.

**Principle #2 – A righteous man can accomplish many great things that others cannot accomplish.**

A third principle is that the prayers of a righteous man may not be able to rescue his own children.

**Principle #3 – A righteous man may not be able to rescue his children.**

A fourth principle is that the prayers of a righteous man may be able to only rescue himself.

**Principle #4 – A righteous man may be able to only rescue himself.**

This leads us to the fifth principle. We need to become righteous men and women.

**Principle #5 – So, we need to become righteous men and women.**